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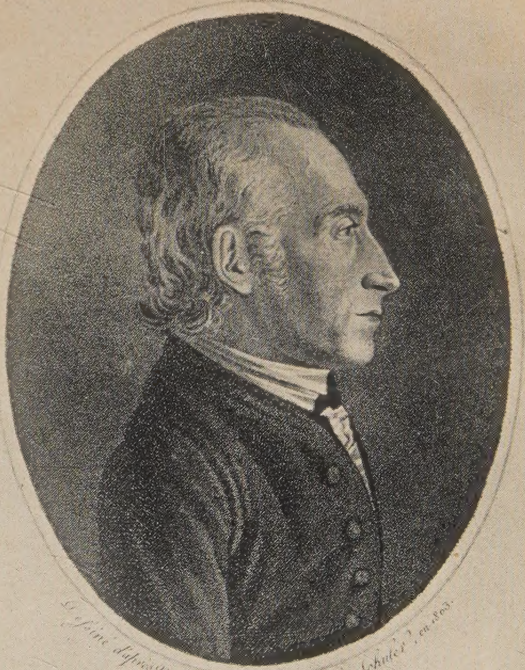
THE STORY OF

JOHN FREDERIC OBERLIN



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JEAN FREDERIC OBERLIN

Ministre à Waldbach au ban de la Roche âgé de 62 ans.

THE STORY

OF

JOHN FREDERIC OBERLIN

BY

AUGUSTUS FIELD BEARD

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PREFACE

THE story of JOHN FREDERIC OBERLIN, written in French, was published in Strasburg in 1831, five years after his death. The author, D. E. Stoeber, a lawyer, a friend of Oberlin, was in his youth a student under his instruction and for several years a member of his household. In the preparation of his biography he had the assistance of Madame Rauscher, Oberlin's daughter, whose husband had succeeded Oberlin in his pastorate, with full access to his complete and careful diary of more than sixty years, and whatever writings were left by Oberlin. In his preface he says: "I am going to relate his life with sincerity and truth. The family of Oberlin, to which I have been bound by fraternal friendship for nearly forty years, has been kind enough to confide numerous manuscripts of the illustrious deceased to me; other friends have furnished me notes; my own remembrances have done the rest."

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The result was an exhaustive compilation of facts which are well-nigh unreadable in form. A limited edition, intended for the parishes of Oberlin and the Alsatians who were then acquainted with his work in their mountain country, was sold by subscription. It soon passed out of print; few copies are now in existence.

Some minor biographies gleaned from this work were published in Germany, France, and England at about the same period, rather in the style of memoirs than in balanced biographies. None, I think, was given in what seems to me the necessary historical setting. These also have gone the way of this kind of literature for more than half a century.

The perusal of Stoeber's *Life of Oberlin*, a copy of which I obtained in France, perhaps the only one in this country, led me to visit the scene of his labors. It was in the summer of 1886 that I made my first study of the little village of Waldersbach in the mountains of the Vosges. Less than a hundred houses comprise it, prominent among which is the manse which Oberlin built and in which he lived. It was occupied at the time by the pastor whose accomplished wife is the granddaughter of Oberlin. Sixty years had then passed since Oberlin's death, but the

house remained almost entirely as he left it. His library was there, his manuscripts which were accessible, and much of his furniture as aforetime. The church near by was without change in appearance since he preached in it his last sermon.

Sixteen years afterwards it was my privilege to repeat this visit, taking abundant time of several weeks to acquaint myself with the country and its local history, to tramp over its steeps and study its people, to trace if possible in the conditions of the present somewhat more of the secret of this notable life hidden away in the hills among a neglected peasantry, the grace of which now nearly fourscore years after his death has not lost its charm.

I find it quite impossible to designate my indebtedness for what I have gleaned here and there, especially among the descendants of Oberlin's former parishioners and in my personal visits and interviews with the descendants of his family.

The *Vie de J. F. Oberlin, Pasteur au Ban-de-la-Roche, par D. E. Stoeber*, is the established authority for the facts of Oberlin's life and work which I have undertaken to retell. *Le Ban-de-la-Roche, Notes Historiques et Souvenirs par*

Mme. Ernest Roerich, has placed me under obligations in the way of local history.

It has seemed to me that a life so remarkably prophetic in its anticipations of many modern educational theories and methods, so entirely in advance of its day in the apprehension of the brotherhood of man and in the largeness of Christian fraternity and in his theories of social betterment and service, so unique and heroic in Christian consecration, with its lessons and inspirations for an age in which the temptations are great to unduly exalt the material, should be recalled and remembered. As a study of sympathy with people in low conditions and of faith in their possibilities through the application of Christian truth exampled in a great life, the story of Oberlin must be significant.

The fact, moreover, that a great institution of learning like Oberlin College bears and honors his name with the rich inheritance of his spirit, should add interest to the history of this remarkable man.

INTRODUCTION

I AM very glad to respond to Dr. Beard's request to add a word of introduction to his life of Oberlin. As president of the college that is proud to bear Oberlin's name and counts that name one of the richest parts of its inheritance, it is perhaps not unnatural that I should be asked to speak this introductory word; and I do this all the more gladly because I have myself read the manuscript with great interest.

But, quite aside from these personal connections, it is a pleasure to speak any word that may help at all to bring to others acquaintance with the great soul here portrayed; for I am convinced that few lives deserve so well to be kept before the attention of men as the life of Oberlin. Just because Oberlin was, to use Dr. Beard's own words, "a unique figure in missionary consecration and service, a great man who lived a great life in isolation, who yet made himself felt beyond the boundaries of France, an educational and theological prophet, anticipating much modern thought in both directions," the record of his life cannot fail to be full of suggestion along many

lines. It contains inspiration to good citizenship, to high public service, to truer living, to better teaching, to more devoted ministry.

Just as I have hoped that I might believe that the college named after this man has been able to continue in its life something of his splendid qualities, and especially that it might not fail to achieve his own rare combination of breadth of view and passionate devotion to the cause of God and the needs of men, so I may wish for the readers of his life that they may feel the inspiring contagion of his spirit.

HENRY CHURCHILL KING

OBERLIN COLLEGE
December 3, 1908

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I

YOUTH AND PREPARATION

JOHN FREDERIC OBERLIN

I

YOUTH AND PREPARATION

(1740–1767)

JOHN FREDERIC OBERLIN was born August 31, 1740, in Strasburg when it was a city of France. The Oberlin family — one of the most prominent among the Protestants of the city — was marked by superior intellectual cultivation and an earnest religious faith. His father was a professor in the gymnasium, a school preparatory to the university, and was highly esteemed as an educator; an elder brother who had already won distinction as a linguist was an honored professor in the university. An inscription on his tomb in the famous church of St. Thomas in Strasburg, by the side of the mausoleum of Marshal Saxe, perpetuates the record of his high rank and fame as a scholar. His mother, a daughter of one of the professors of the university, was a woman

of rare endowments, with a poetic spirit and musical gifts, exceptionally witty in conversation, who made a profound impression with her strong and happy character upon her children. The father was both the instructor and playmate of his children. At a place named Schiltigheim, where he owned a cottage and a few acres of land, and where the family passed their summers, the villagers would often see the professor with an old drum acting as drill sergeant and drummer at the same time, putting the boys through military evolutions. Fritz — as he was always called, even into his later years — became passionately fond of these exercises, and the ideas of strictness, obedience, and discipline behind them remained with him and account for certain subsequent characteristics.

As in the case of most teachers in all places everywhere, there was a small income and a large family. By necessity the strictest economy reigned in the household. Such straitened conditions are not pleasant, but they are often turned to advantage, and this was the experience of the Oberlin family. A few sous were given to each of the children weekly, to encourage them in habits of prudent calculation and to train them in the practise of benevolence. Often when the

family exchequer ran unexpectedly low and bills to be paid came in, the children would be able to meet the emergency from their boxes of savings. This spirit of economy, and at the same time of charity, together with the practise of keeping accurate accounts, took deep root in the boy's heart and went into the formation of his character. Many incidents of his methods of economy and his accompanying ideas of responsibility for charity are related of his boyhood and youth.

In one of his unedited sermons a passage occurs with its side-light upon him in this early period of his life: "I remember in my youth passing through a crowded street and hearing a girl crying out in anger, 'Look, see that fine lady with the pearls around her neck! She bought them with the money my father was cheated out of. My father was shoemaker for her father and was not paid. Our fathers are dead; I am poor and wretched, but his daughter is dressed like a peacock.'" Oberlin related this as an illustration of dishonesty in not meeting just obligations.

His fellow students discovered in Oberlin this frugality and economy which they mistook for penuriousness, at the temporary cost of his personal popularity. One of them, while passing

with him over a bridge in the city, determined to give his classmate a lesson, corrective of his supposed parsimony. Taking a coin from his pocket he hurled it into the water, saying, "See that, Fritz?" There was no reply to this foolish performance, but later on, meeting a blind man, Oberlin gave him a coin such as the student had thrown away, simply saying to his companion, "See?" So early had he learned the lesson of regard for those who suffered in the hardships of life.

In his university course the home influence revealed itself to indicate how he was developing his positiveness of character. While he was well endowed mentally, he was slow in memorizing — not an uncommon experience with minds which make their original channels rather than run into those of others. Determined at any cost to overcome what he considered a serious defect, he used the early morning hours in memory practise, when his mind was fresh and retentive, and for fear of oversleeping mornings and thus losing his self-imposed discipline, he habitually placed pieces of wood in his bed to prevent him from sleeping too soundly. During his entire college course he was thus strict with himself, in many ways permitting no opportunity for im-

provement to be lost. He could not satisfy himself to take hold of a study without every effort to master it. Whatever the extra labors, whatever denials of temporary pleasure, he counted as nothing when they stood between him and his purpose.

His university studies were made under eminent professors, and from them he took his degree of Bachelor of Arts at the age of eighteen years, and when, five years later, he had won the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, he remained a student yet undecided as to his future vocation. He was not at this time looking forward to the pulpit. His mother was a regular attendant at the church services of Pastor Lorentz, whose theological views were considered so questionable that Fritz did not care to be among his hearers. To please his mother, however, he would accompany her to church, and this resulted in his becoming sympathetic with the pastor and a regular attendant upon his preaching. This Pastor Lorentz, who was also professor while Oberlin was a student in the university, was subsequently suspended by the ecclesiastical authorities for variance from their standards, and his classroom was deserted by the students. Oberlin regarded the action as un-

just and championed the professor against the popular majority. At the hours of recitation formerly held by the professor Oberlin proceeded daily to his house, rang the bell, bowed gravely to the one who opened the door as a mark of his great and undiminished respect, and retired. The repetition of this amused the students and made him the subject of their good-natured banter. It was no question for him, however, what they thought or chose to do. He believed that his professor had been wronged, and for one, if the only one, he proposed to stand for him. Any coward can go with a majority. Oberlin was not a coward.

By this time Oberlin had thought out for himself his way into the gospel ministry and he soon "took orders" in the Lutheran Church. But he had settled the question of direction only, not yet of service, and when he was urged to take a pastoral charge he replied, "No, I am not qualified. To preach to others, I need more of the experience of life. Moreover, I do not wish to labor in some comfortable pastoral charge, like either of those suggested, where I can be at ease. The question is, Where can I be most useful?" He was not attracted to the parishes which others were ready to seek and eager to seize. He would

choose rather a work which would not be done unless he should do it.

The thought which at this time appears to have been uppermost was the divinity of thorough preparedness. Meanwhile he found an opportunity to assist both himself and his parents by acting as tutor to students who needed help over the hard places in their studies. In this way he proved himself to be "apt to teach," and was much sought after. This led to his engagement as a private tutor in the family of the most eminent surgeon in Strasburg, Dr. Zeigenhagen. Oberlin saw at once the rare advantages of this position, and without neglecting his specific duties as tutor eagerly devoted himself to medical and surgical studies. He also took up the study of botany, which he pursued diligently. He remained here until he had made no small attainment in those studies. He did not know how he might use this knowledge, but he did realize that every mastery will sometime prove itself in unthought-of ways and be of service.

From the time that Oberlin was twenty years of age — two years after his university graduation — he began to keep a journal. In those days this was the unfailing repository of one's

religious experiences. It was quite the custom for people of an introversive temperament and of severe and earnest life to commit their thoughts and feelings to paper, as few do now in this less subjective age. Oberlin's journal, still extant, contains the most manly resolutions to rule his life strongly and severely. "I wish to force myself," he writes, "to conquer my natural inclination, neither to eat nor drink more than necessary for my health. I wish to force myself to rule my anger, which so often gets the best of me. I wish to content myself with the least possible in the way of clothing and furniture, that I may always put aside some portion of my income for the poor, and to pay those who serve in such a way as will satisfy them, but in so far as possible to get on without unnecessary help." His "act of consecration to God," dated January 1, 1760, indicates the intensity of his feelings: — "I am now convinced of Thy rights. I desire nothing more than to belong to the holy God. I give myself to Thee this day in the most solemn way. I consecrate all that I am and all I have, the faculties of my soul, the members of my body, my portion and my time." This was endorsed as follows: "Renewed at Waldbach, January 1, 1770."

We may not regret the fact that self-dedication

to God is no longer likely to take these ancient forms of devotion, but certainly there is great promise for future usefulness when a serious-minded youth in looking out upon life can find himself ready to take as truthful a view of his relationships to God and man as did this young student at twenty years of age. Nor was this a mere formal act of consecration on the part of Oberlin. His fervency of soul was without affectation. He had come to desire to devote himself, with full sincerity in the love of God, with his whole heart and soul and strength, to the service of his fellow men. His sympathy with humanity, his practicality, his humor, his cheerfulness of spirit, and his love and appreciation of nature were sufficient to counteract any tendency toward an unnatural mannerism of piety.

At this time Oberlin had been offered a chaplaincy in a French regiment and had accepted it. The military drills of his youth had left him with strong predilections for such a life, and he saw in it a prospect of peculiar usefulness, gratifying to his sense of duty in that it would enable him to influence and protect young men away from the restraining influences of home and subject to great temptations. In anticipa-

tion of this and preparatory to the assumption of his duties he had resigned his tutorship and taken lodgings in the city, where he was pursuing a special course of reading. Particularly he was studying Voltaire, that he might be better able to combat the current unbelief in the army. This was his plan, but it was not God's purpose.

On a cold February evening, while Oberlin was lying on his pallet with a distorted face and suffering terribly from the toothache, a missionary from the Vosges Mountains entered the apartment. He sent a scrutinizing glance around, evidently struck with the poverty of the room, and at once introduced himself.

"Ah, Pastor Stuber," said Oberlin, "welcome, Herr Pastor; but what can have brought you here to me?"

"First of all, of course, the desire to make your acquaintance; then, because I have some business with you."

"You certainly surprise me, Herr Pastor. It must be some very urgent business that has brought you up to the third story to an unknown student such as I am."

"Not so unknown as you suppose, Herr Oberlin. I have learned about you. Your name has been mentioned to me as one who does not fol-

low the beaten paths or routine of ministerial candidates. You have studied surgery and medicine. You have a knowledge of botany and medicinal herbs. Is not this so?"

"In my leisure hours I paid some attention to botany; Dr. Zeigenhagen has taught me bloodletting, and I have had some experience in the anatomical room."

Oberlin had raised himself upon his pallet and was listening with swollen cheek upon his hand.

"And you speak French?"

"A little, Herr Pastor."

"Your brother, Jeremias, assures me that you speak it perfectly. This is very rare in Strasburg. It is a most uncommon example among our candidates."

"I tell you, my dear pastor, that my brother flatters me and spoils me. It is not a good thing in him, and I would much prefer that he would communicate to me some of his extensive scientific knowledge rather than encourage me in idleness."

"Indeed, my young friend, you must have a very agreeable brother; and yet as professor he is not understood to be very indulgent. Will you be kind enough to explain to me what this little pan means that I see there by your lamp?"

A deep blush ran over Oberlin's face. "Pardon the cooking, Herr Pastor! I take my dinner with my parents, and I bring away some bread which my good mother gives me. At eight o'clock I put this little pan over my lamp, place my bread in it, with a little water and salt. Then I go on with my studies."

"You are my man," exclaimed Stuber, rising from his chair.

"What is the matter, Herr Pastor? Do you think I am ridiculous in my habits?"

"You live on the diet of Lacedæmon. Yes, you are my man."

Oberlin was confused, not to say excited. He did not comprehend Stuber.

Stuber answered, "I see you do not understand me; but I have got my man and I shall not let you go. I want you for the pastorship of Waldbach in the Ban-de-la-Roche."

Oberlin, overwhelmed with surprise, offered all manner of objections, but Stuber in intense earnestness continued with excited voice:

"Yes, sir, you are my man. The Master you have to serve calls you by my voice. Listen; you must become pastor at Waldbach. In the name of the Master and Lord of us all I tell you this. There are a hundred poor and wretched

families in want of the bread of life; four or five hundred to direct and to save. Yes, poor and wretched and friendless!"

Oberlin's heart was in a tumult. This was just the field of labor he had wished — his ideal of missionary work; but there were difficulties in the way. He had been appointed chaplain to a regiment in the French Army called the "Royal Alsace," and his word of acceptance had just been given. Ought he to seek release from the post of duty, even supposing he might be released? He frankly thought not. He urged this upon Stuber, saying, "My dear brother in Christ, you honor me very much. But there are everywhere souls to save and direct, and in the regiments of the king more than elsewhere. The devil is close on the heels of these young, gay officers that display themselves so gracefully on the promenade and on parade; the devil is incessantly ruining the soldiers in the taverns and in all manner of bad places. I assure you, my dear pastor, that as chaplain I am going to hunt Satan; besides, I have given my word; and furthermore, may I without offense ask you why you quit the Ban-de-la-Roche if the need is so great and there is so much good to be done there?"

"My young friend, I shall not leave the Ban-de-la-Roche until my place there is filled by such a man as you. I leave because my poor wife is dying far from medical aid. She cannot live there; the air is too severe for her."

"That alters the case," said Oberlin, holding out his hand to Stuber. "Your parish must then be in a very cold region."

"I do not wish to exaggerate anything, my dear Oberlin. Six months of winter; at times the cold of the shores of the Baltic; a wind like ice sometimes comes down from the mountain tops above us; the sick and the dying are to be visited in remote, wild, solitary places among the forests. My wife often was almost dead with terror, supposing me lost in the snow-storms. It is like the passages of the Alps. Have you ever been in Switzerland?"

"Never, but I can easily imagine it. But then I suppose your summers are fine and somewhat compensate for the rigors of the winter?"

"Four or five short months interrupted by winds and storms. Yes, the fragrant odors of some meadows perfume the summer air, and rye ripens well in good seasons."

"And your parishioners, — are they well disposed?"

"Not too much so, not too much, I must say without calumniating them! There are some good souls there who are much attached to me; but they are all frightfully ignorant and untractable and proud of their ignorance. It is an iron-headed people, a population of Cyclops. When I went there the schoolmaster was a swineherd in the summer; in winter he taught the children in a miserable hut the little he knew. I have contended now these ten years with a rebellious material. I had left Waldbach for a few years of ministry in the delightful town of Barr. It was in the midst of vineyards, and my young family flourished like the vines in the warm sun, but when I heard that my successor had allowed the bark freighted with souls which I had committed to his charge to drift, my heart bled. I returned again to Waldbach and laid hold of the rudder, but now I can hold it no longer. I have told you the reason why."

Oberlin was taking in the situation. He slowly lifted his large blue eyes and asked: "Have you any material resources to aid the poor? You say most of them are extremely poor."

"My parishioners have nothing. I myself have very little. My wife's small fortune is already

exhausted in relieving a little the general misery. Four districts even poorer than the mother parish are also to be served; not a single practicable road from village to village; deep mud holes among the cabins and huts; the fruit, wild cherries, apples, and pears fit only for swine; and the inhabitants abandoned to the completest indifference have not the least concern to ameliorate their condition. The Intendant of Alsace, who knows the British Islands, has told me that my parishioners and their pigs are a miniature Ireland.

"I have not told you all," continued Stuber. "I will come again at another time. I much fear, however, that you will answer me as two of your fellow candidates have already done: 'It is much pleasanter to live here in a good climate than up there among the rude people in that inclement air of the Vosges.'"

"I do not say that, Herr Pastor; far from it. Every one of your words has knocked at the door of my heart like the blows of a hammer. What agony it is to find one's self thus in life at a dividing road without knowing which way to go! Ah, what a regret that I gave my word to accept the chaplaincy only a few days since!"

Stuber understood the struggle in Oberlin's heart.

"I will not urge you now," he said. "I will come to-morrow. We will see what can be done to release you from your engagement. I will come to-morrow; perhaps then I may get your answer."

"Indeed, it is not necessary to wait till to-morrow to ask God to enlighten us. We will appeal to him now to tell us on which side duty may be."

Thereupon Stuber knelt on the tiles of the attic and prayed, while Oberlin with him implored the guidance of the Lord. The Spirit of God was with them. This poor upper room was very near to heaven, and when the two lifted their heads, in silence they joined hands. The struggle was over. It was settled that Oberlin would go to the mountains if the vacant position in the army could be satisfactorily filled.

Conviction was action. There were not lacking those who were more than ready to take the attractive chaplaincy. Oberlin was honorably released, and on March 30, 1767, in his twenty-seventh year, he arrived at Waldbach.

There have been many battles in Strasburg. The Roman armies have fought there. The

Germans have triumphed there. The tricolors of France in turn have waved in victory there; but the issues of the moral conflict between faith and sight, between the previous choice and the present call to a life of self-abnegation, made this decision a more glorious conquering than ever came to any hero of war.

II

THE PARISHES IN THE MOUNTAINS OF THE VOSGES

II

THE PARISHES IN THE MOUNTAINS OF THE VOSGES

(1584–1767)

TO understand or appreciate the mission of Oberlin it is necessary to keep in sight certain facts of history. The district to which he went had been from early history a disputed territory. Alsatia formed a part of Ancient Gaul, and as such was included in the Roman empire. The Romans held it for half a century, when it passed to the Franks. About the middle of the tenth century it became German. Later, in 1648, most of it was ceded to France, and subsequently nearly all which had remained German provinces were made over to France.

Thus the "Ban-de-la-Roche" was a French district, then German, then French again, and since 1871 is once more German. In each case until the last it was held as a fief. The people

were vassals oppressed by wars and often by cruel lords.

This district contains two parishes of about nine thousand acres, one Rothau, and the other consisting of the little villages of Waldbach, Wildersbach, Solbach, Bellefosse, Belmont, and Fouday. Waldbach, the home of Oberlin and the most nearly central, is about three thousand feet above the sea. The other villages are higher.

While much of the history of this region of the Vosges is evidently legendary, there is authentic authority that in the fifteenth century there was a Roman Catholic priest directing the worship in the little village of Fouday, though the date of the beginning of the village is not given. In 1584 the Prince of Valence — the lord of the fief — sought to give a new start to several enterprises in the Ban which a previous owner had undertaken but had failed to develop. A mine for copper was opened at Waldbach, and one for silver in the neighboring hamlet of Belmont, with furnaces and forges. The prince decided, since affairs were as bad as they could be, that a change of religion would be to the advantage of his fief, and concluded to introduce in the Ban in their behalf — and his own — the "Reformed religion."

The Catholic priest at Fouday by this action was to lose his living. It was very poor, but so was he, and such as it was he wanted it. It was easier for him to exchange his Catholic gown for the pastoral garb of the "Reformed" than it was for him to move away. His convictions did not distress him either way, and as the ecclesiastical transition would be less embarrassing than a removal, like the Vicar of Bray, he decided to stay. Remain he did in the capacity of Protestant pastor, as good as he was before and no better. We may be sure he did not greatly help the "Reformed religion" or any other.

About the year 1600 the district had become, through a deadly epidemic, almost entirely depopulated, and as it was important to the mining interests that a new people should be found to make good the losses of the original inhabitants, many Swiss Protestant people were induced to move into the hills. Refugees from bitter religious persecutions in France also sought shelter there.

The new attempt at civilization in the Ban, however, went no further than the beginnings. Immediately — and almost an exact century after Luther posted his theses on the door at Witten-

berg — the " Thirty Years' War " began. Starting as a struggle between Protestant and Catholic princes in Germany, it involved almost all the states of the continent, and raged until it had wrought well-nigh universal wretchedness. Trades and industries perished. Its remorseless flames swept not only the palaces of the nobles in the cities but the hovels of the peasants also in remote places.

The little villages of the Ban-de-la-Roche were overrun by hostile bands of soldiers, who made it impossible for the terrorized people to cultivate their fields even in their poor way. They were in constant fear of attack and pillage. Often they were compelled to seek the depths of the forests for safety, living upon such herbs as they could find.

Previous to these disastrous times a Protestant church and a manse had been built at Waldbach. The manse was so rude that the incumbent of it invariably called it " the rat hole." It does not appear that his unattractive designation caused him to do anything to improve it. He remained at Waldbach during a part of the Thirty Years' War, and certain records which he left still exist.

In 1647 the Ban found itself a second time

well-nigh depopulated, all the villages together numbering no more than ninety people, and when the war ended in 1648 the sufferings of the entire generation had been so great and the misery so extreme that the five villages of the Ban together had but forty-three survivors.

A half century passed, and the country again recovered itself, until the district comprised nearly one hundred families; but all this time it had been a hard battle for sheer existence. In the short summer season the people gathered barely enough food to sustain their impoverished life through the long winter, only to renew the struggle when the snows melted. With no trades and without industries other than the rudest agriculture, and with no intelligent cultivation of the soil for this, their roads mere by-paths, their streams without bridges, their food scanty and coarse, what could be looked for but hopeless and hapless lives?

It would be incorrect indeed to leave the impression that nothing had been done to ameliorate their sad condition. The churches at Fouday and Waldbach from time to time since 1626 had received as many as twelve different pastors, ministering with long interruptions; but war and pestilence had destroyed most of their work. Some of them, moreover, had been poor shep-

herds who had left no evidences of usefulness. The forms of religion had not been entirely lost but had been wholly neglected, and life was such a constant wrestle with poverty that nothing better than the conditions described could have been expected.

To the poor people with such an inheritance of hard history and poor life, came in 1750 the forerunner of Oberlin, Pastor Jean Georges Stuber. He was twenty-eight years of age, a graduate of the University of Strasburg, with superior literary and scientific culture, and thoroughly consecrated to his missionary work. He soon saw that nothing permanent could be hoped for in attempting to evangelize the existing ignorance. Missionaries had preached to the people and failed. Stuber realized that righteousness needs knowledge and that ignorance is both uncertain and superstitious. He saw as none had before him, that there must be coworking of religion and education, the one for energy, the other for wisdom and permanence. His first work, therefore, was to establish schools, one in each little village. These were primitive enough, but they were beginnings. He made himself responsible for expenses, and procured for the pupils books and paper and ink, visiting Strasburg from

time to time to solicit aid, and to interest the benevolent in this new form of missionary service. He was one of those, of whom there are few, who are blessed with the valuable gift of promoting charity in others. Let us be grateful for a succession of such philanthropic souls. The world is less selfish because of them. Both his tact and the courage in his solicitation come down to us in an illustration. The provost of the Ban-de-la-Roche resided in Strasburg. Stuber asked of him lumber enough to build a schoolhouse. This high personage, in rather a disheartening way, declined to contribute; but Stuber, by no means disconcerted by his positive refusal, said, "I trust your Excellency will not forbid me to call upon some charitably disposed people and solicit aid for such a needful work." "Not at all, not at all; call upon whom you please." "Well," replied Stuber, with his pleasantest smile, "as your Excellency is well known for his charity and good deeds, I will begin here," holding out his hat. The nerve and the manner of it pleased the provost and ended in his contributing the whole amount of lumber for the school and in making an express condition that Stuber should dine with him every time he visited Strasburg.

Stuber, who had rare gifts in music, introduced in his little schools musical instruction. For a generation there had been no singing; no one knew how to sing correctly. There was not a Bible or a Testament in the entire district. He secured copies of these, and edited a catechism, to bring out the more vital Christian teachings. He repaired the church building at Waldbach and began a public library with a hundred volumes.

Thus for ten years in two pastorates, from 1750 to 1754, and again from 1760 to 1767, Stuber grappled with the difficulties of this neglected field, attacking the ignorance and the poverty of the people in these ways, but not without encountering much opposition. Fixed in their habits, most of the people did not know enough to wish for improvement and few had any desire to be made better.

Ten years were too few to overcome the inertia of a long-degraded heredity and to change the habits of feeling, thought, and action which had been handed down for many generations. Doubtless it often seemed a long time to this man who, single-handed and alone, was carrying the heavy burden. His failing health, and the more rapid decline of the health of his wife, at

last compelled him to leave this laborious service without having made much impression. But he had put too much of his life into this wretched charge now to remit his interest when he left it to assume a pastorate in Strasburg. He could not endure the thought that the work which he had begun might be lost or that it should fall into unworthy hands. His problem was, "Can any one be found willing to take up the task of bringing redemption to these rude people and to endure the hardness of life which this involves?" It was with this question that he had gone to Oberlin, and it was with this history of bitter life on the part of the people and of his almost hopeless endeavor that Oberlin in the strength of his early manhood had answered him, saying, "I will go."

III

EDUCATIONAL THEORIES AND PRACTISE

III

EDUCATIONAL THEORIES AND PRACTISE

(1767–1771)

IN the little village which was to be his home and from which he was to reach out to the four other parishes in his charge, Oberlin installed himself. We have seen how the work was represented to him by Stuber. Now that he acquainted himself with it, what did he find and how did it appear to him?

Some have thought that his biographers under the spell of his remarkable personality have unconsciously darkened the history and conditions of this forlorn field, as painters shade their pictures in order that the principal figures may better stand out from the background. It was soon evident enough, however, that Stuber, in his relation to Oberlin of the condition of things, did not overstate the severe and difficult conditions. The country was indeed in extremest poverty.

The people of the fief were compelled to do feudal duty in severe forms. The provosts and their subalterns were so exacting in their demands that life was a practical slavery. One form of the service required was to bring coal to the furnaces at Waldbach, and to carry over the rugged mountain ways the iron from the mines to the forges at Rothau. The poverty of some was so extreme that one presentable suit of clothes was made to answer for different members of the family and was worn alternately, and one pair of sabots had to serve for all the household. Tax dues far beyond their ability accumulated year by year. Oberlin writes: "Money-gatherers are going about saying, 'Pay up, pay up,' and it is difficult to save them from the hands of the sheriff. Whoever secures enough bread for a whole year is considered very rich." Again, he records in his journal the joy of a poor widow upon receiving a cent which he had feared to offer her lest he should offend her, and further on adds, "Oh, I wish that he who has not learned to save, to be content with little, to limit himself to simple food and clothing, to refuse all frivolous things, might learn and know the life of our poor Ban-de-la-Roche. It is difficult for those in comfort to understand what extreme poverty means."

WALDERSLACH (FORMERLY WALDBACH): HOME AND CHURCH OF OBERLIN

His diary, which is full, does not anywhere, however, reveal any discouragement. He was afflicted by the misery of the people, but he was wont to get mental relief from the scenes of it by turning to nature about him. The mountains uplifted his spirit. He loved the fields and meadows of the valleys with the streams coursing through them. They helped him to postpone for the time his thoughts of the surrounding human sorrow. His botany paid him rich rewards for the investment of his past study. The flora of the fields, varied and rich, greatly interested him. Of one of his excursions as winter approached he writes: "Nature was of marvelous beauty. The valleys and hills were of a dazzling whiteness. The pine-trees were covered with hoar frost. The frozen snow reflected everywhere brilliantly the rays of the sun."

Again he refers to the satisfaction which came to him in this communion with nature — "with the hills lighted up by the sun, variegated by the ever-changing shadows of the trees." With all his tendency to self-introspection there could be nothing morbid in his mind, which thus delighted in nature studies and in the glory which the world puts on.

Of the ancient parsonage into which he came he writes: "I was living in an old house where I endured continual embarrassments and losses both by the rats and the rain, which went through everything, but I would not think of a better one until the schools are comfortably lodged."

It did not take a long time for him to grasp the situation before him. No temporary amelioration would do; no patchwork upon existing conditions. It was not worth while to put new wine into the old bottles. The reformation must be absolutely radical. Long-established evils to which the people were born and which had been strengthened and confirmed by generations of ignorance called for entirely new environments if there was to be any worthy life. But Oberlin did not make the mistake, too common in our day, that a mere change in material conditions for the better, even if this could be effected, would insure a permanent betterment of the people. The foundation hope for better environments that would stay must rest in the fact that a better people would work them out and maintain them. The necessary changes in methods and manners of life must begin in the character of the people or they would prove to be unreal and temporary. Character alone would

remove the miseries which afflicted them. As this should be understood and accepted their material conditions would improve, and these in turn would react and become great factors to facilitate the life impulse and the qualities which had made for their improvement. This was Oberlin's social theory, and a true one. To remove evil is not enough. There must be a moral redemption and moral power for any permanent welfare. Oberlin clearly saw that this meant ceaseless patience, and a courage which would hold on through whatever disappointments and over whatever oppositions and never falter. No short-lived enthusiasms or temporary purposes were worth consideration. There must be a faith that would not surrender, and there must be full time for faith's fruitage in the internal character of the people.

Oberlin had gone to his people first of all as a pastor, for which office he had particularly prepared himself. The spiritual welfare of his flock naturally was his supreme consideration, but he saw at once how little mere preaching and evangelizing could accomplish in this material and moral desolation. True, his work was to save souls. But he must do it by saving men and women. More; this work of salvation must

largely be wrought out before souls became men and women. This was quite a new missionary idea. Aforetime, the missionary way was to preach the truths of the Bible to grown-up people and to urge their acceptance; to gather churches, and to minister to them. It came to Oberlin that taking the gospel as the power of God unto salvation in the ignorance about him was not nearly so simple a matter as this. He saw clearly the connection between physical misery and moral degradation. He could not deal with those who were bearing in themselves the penalties of the lack of knowledge as if they were disembodied spirits. They must be taught how to meet their physical destitution and their mental destitution also. They must be ministered to as those who have a life to work out now, as well as an expectant life in a world to come. His mission was not simply to rescue here and there a vacant mind, nor to "throw out the life-line" to shipwrecked souls, but the kingdom of God is "as if a man should cast seed upon the earth," and it should grow by all kinds of help, "he knoweth not how," but not without long watching and care and waiting. In this way Oberlin broadened the missionary interpretation of salvation with the beginning of his ministry.

He would therefore place the first emphasis upon schools. To multiply Christian schools means to multiply Christian men and women; and where these grow in numbers schools are sure to develop in scope and quality, and preachers and teachers will not fail to be made ready for the growing kingdom. First, then, in the order both of time and importance, there must be schools; not only indispensable for the present, but also the only guaranty of the future. But how to get these was the question. Stuber had built one little schoolhouse before Oberlin came — a single, poor, one-room affair — for five villages miles apart. This was but little better than nothing at the first, and now was in a ruinous state.

Oberlin began with a scheme of education which staggered the faith of his friends. It asked, they thought, for too much to expect realization. There must be teachers thoroughly competent and earnest. For this the people themselves could do absolutely nothing, even if they could have appreciated such a use of funds when they were in great material destitution. Any attempt to add to their burdens was sure to be resisted, nor could they understand why schools should be regarded as a first necessity. As

Oberlin's entire salary was only about $200 a year, on which he was to live, it was evident that he could not erect many schoolhouses from his personal treasury. Nevertheless he decided — to use his own words — "it must be done," and he proceeded to the doing without delay. He purchased the ground and drew the plans of a sufficiently commodious schoolhouse. Faith and works joined hands. He prayed to God and he prayed to men. Stuber was in Strasburg among influential friends, and Oberlin was not without friends there, and together they did not fail to make their wants known. A loan of sixteen hundred francs — about $320 — was obtained. Oberlin made himself personally responsible for it, relying upon the assurance of two thousand francs in the future — $400 — promised by a benevolent lady in Strasburg.

So far well, but this was not very far. His disturbed parishioners arose with an emphatic "No!" They opposed the entire scheme. They said, "Before the building is completed we shall be taxed for it, and we are taxed to death now. We will not submit to another tax."

"You shall not be taxed for it," said Oberlin.

"But we will have to keep it in repair," they replied, "and we don't want it and we will not

have it. We know what it means. It means burdens imposed upon us."

The unruly spirits in the Ban were exceedingly active, and there are always unruly spirits everywhere if they can get half a chance to make trouble. Now they had their opportunity with Oberlin and they used it. They had already begun to criticize his preaching. He was too direct. He was too much in earnest. He was too radical. He was forever suggesting changes, and they protested against his innovations. The more headstrong decided to attack him personally. "Our pastor is too fiery," they said; "we will cool him off. We will put him under the spout when he passes by." Oberlin heard of the threat and lost no time in going to the headquarters of the opposers. "Why, friends, if you expect to wet me you do not know my horse. But if you really wish to do it, to make the thing easier for you I will leave my horse at home, and go on foot after this to give you a chance." After this interview they hesitated, and decided to rest with the threat.

At another time Oberlin received information that certain ones opposed to his ideas had a plan to waylay him and inflict personal castigation. This would intimidate him and prevent his future

interferences. Learning where the malcontents had come together, he immediately appeared to them. "Here I am, my friends, without fear. I am acquainted with your design and that you propose to chastise me. Very well, if I am culpable punish me for it. It is better that I should deliver myself into your hands than that you should be guilty of an ambuscade to do this." As in other cases, this ended by the peasants in sheer shame yielding their intention.

Still, the determined and almost violent opposition to the proposed schoolhouse could not be overcome. It assumed such proportion that Oberlin and Stuber, helping him from Strasburg, bound themselves by a written contract that "we will build a schoolhouse and it shall not cost the inhabitants anything, either in grain or in labor." This agreement brought a final though not a cheerful consent.

"It was inexpressible joy to me," wrote Oberlin, "when I saw from week to week the structure going up." When it was finished, a debt of one thousand francs — equal to his entire year's salary — rested on Oberlin, which it took him several years with his strictest economy to pay.

This building was no sooner completed than

he immediately began another at Bellefosse, a few miles away. Here there was less opposition, as he was now gradually gaining the confidence of the people. The construction of this building occupied a year and a half, and left an additional personal debt of another thousand francs on Oberlin, which, like the former one, was paid at length by his continuous savings. In a few years the inhabitants of the other villages came forward voluntarily and took the cost and care upon themselves of building their own schoolhouses, until each village had its own.

These secured, Oberlin bent his energies to find well-qualified teachers who would carry out his ideas of an education, fitted for the special and peculiar experience of the class of people under his charge. He well understood that the teacher makes the school, but teachers could not be constructed like schoolhouses. True teachers, like poets, are born, not made. While he was busy in securing them — and he did secure them — he was also planning and drawing up his courses of instruction. Some idea of the starting-point of ignorance is seen in the quotation, "The pupil must learn to count as far as a thousand, and add and subtract as far as a

hundred." The plan of instruction which he wrote out and prescribed embraced a number of years. It began with the infant school, proceeded through primary, grammar, and advanced grades, with each grade subdivided and classified according to the pupils' attainments.

His "infant schools" were probably the first ever established, and in many of his ideas and methods in his instruction of industrial training, both manual and agricultural, he anticipated Pestalozzi by forty years, and Froebel by full seventy years in many of his educational theories. It has been said that Froebel's best thought was not in relation to the kindergarten, but in relation to the education of adults, to make the whole community a unit of intellectual and moral cooperation. Oberlin not only announced this theory, but he was putting it into practical effect, amid untold oppositions, many years before Froebel was born. His infant schools practised modern kindergarten methods. Observation and experience convinced him that even from the cradle children are capable of being taught to distinguish between right and wrong and of being trained to habits of subordination and industry; and in conjunction with his wife he secured "conductrices" for each hamlet, en-

gaged schoolrooms for them, and became personally responsible for their salaries.

Instruction in these schools was mingled with amusement, and while enough discipline was introduced to instil habits of obedience and attention, a degree of liberty was allowed which left the infant mind the freedom of individuality. During school hours the children were formed in great circles. Two women were employed, one to direct the handicraft, and the other to entertain and instruct. The children of two and three years only were to sit quietly by at intervals, while those of four or six years were taught to knit and spin and sew; and when they were beginning to be weary, they were shown colored pictures relating to Scriptural subjects or natural history and were to recite after the teacher the explanations which she gave. In addition, she taught them to sing songs and hymns and gave them bits of useful information in children's stories. In this way their employments were "varied as much as possible," "care being taken to keep them constantly alert, occupied, and never permitting them to speak a word of patois." When they arrived at the proper age, the children were ready for the primary grades in the public school.

Here again the originality of Oberlin is manifest. He introduced in these grades, and indeed in all grades, a nicely adjusted scheme of "self-government." Monitors were to be chosen by the pupils from among themselves to observe violations of good manners, disobedience, idleness, or any departures from good conduct. These monitors were to serve for given periods of time, when there would be new elections. The pupils also were to choose juries and judges, before whom all cases of discipline were to be brought for judgment. This was more than a century ago, when in schools the accepted theory of discipline meant authority of command and the penalty of the rod.

In the primary grades the pupils were to learn to "spell without a book, to pronounce correctly, and the first ideas of morality and religion." They were to advance to arithmetic "by easy lessons in addition, multiplication, subtraction, and division, upon the blackboard." Through intermediate studies and into what may be called the grammar grade were exercises "in reading and writing, in geography with maps, the study of different peoples, their customs, governments, and religions, arithmetic, grammar, and vocal music." In the higher grades were "natural history,

botany, familiarity with plants, book-keeping, history, astronomy, physics, translations from German into French, the rules of health, first lessons in geometry, pen-making, drawing, and use of colors." Oberlin knew very well that the sciences could not be taught in his schools beyond the first elements, but he was confident that he could aid the habit of observation and study in the science of common things. In his instructions to the teachers the pupils were to learn all that could be taught them " relating to the seasons and the weather, to the productions of the earth, to animals, to men and their food, their clothing and their houses." Concerning property, they were " to learn about inheritances, loans, debts, interest, processes of law, magistrates, and the commonwealth." Our nature studies and civil government studies as they are now taught were pretty well covered in Oberlin's program. The principles of agriculture were also in his curriculum. Added to this, which we should scarcely expect to find in such conditions, was instruction in esthetics. Oberlin purposed to interest these young minds in what is beautiful. They were " to draw from nature and to color their drawings." They were to be taught " to observe the forms and colors of nature and to draw rocks, trees, flowers, and

animals from the things themselves." He furnished from his own purse paper, colors, and pencils for this. From his printed notes for teachers I quote: "Nearly all pupils wish to paint with only brilliant colors. Nevertheless, there are few brilliant colors in nature. Rocks, the trunks of trees, houses, earth, furniture, utensils, have not brilliant colors. If there are some students wise enough to take nature for their model and use quiet colors, I beg gentlemen preceptors to send me their books of drawing that I may examine them." Thus he carefully superintended everything. His schedule was not simply a program; it was to be carried out. He watched and directed it. His personal attention to details is observable in every undertaking, and he placed the greatest importance upon these in education. With him there was no confidence in general oversight which was careless of particular duties. Upon the proper knowledge and adjustment of details general principles work, and he was willing to give time and thought to the things that came nearest to his people. The schedule for each day's work for each school was the same in each village. It is given on the opposite page, and, as will be seen, compares favorably with modern schools.

SUBJECTS OF INSTRUCTION DAY BY DAY AND HOUR BY HOUR

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
1. Arithmetic	1. Arithmetic	1. Arithmetic	1. Arithmetic	1. Arithmetic	1. Arithmetic
2. French grammar	2. Composition of a story with a moral	2. French reading, analysis of a passage	2. French grammar	2. French reading	2. Reading, translation from German into French
3. French reading	3. French grammar	3. Dictation, correction of the passage analyzed	3. Dictation of a chapter of German words	3. Grammatical analysis	3. Notes, singing
4. Geography	4. French reading	4. Catechism	4. Notes and singing	4. Geography	4. Catechism

The children of ten or twelve years of age were required to copy and commit to memory essays upon agriculture and the planting and care of trees. Every child of a certain age was required to plant two trees, and thereafter care for them, the first-fruits of which were presented to the pastor.

Every Sunday the children of each village in rotation were assembled at the church of the village to sing the hymns which they had learned to recite at the schools, and to receive the exhortations of their common father.

As the extraordinary change which these efforts produced became known, it had the effect of putting larger means at Oberlin's disposal. His Strasburg friends increased their subscriptions, and he was enabled to have a number of useful books printed especially for his parishioners. He procured an electrical machine and other philosophical apparatus and certain prizes, both to award to pupils and to teachers. He also began a circulating library, each village retaining books for a time and passing them from house to house. Among the productions prepared by him was a set of school-books for the exclusive use of the Ban-de-la-Roche and adapted to his own program of education. He also pre-

pared and published an almanac, cleared from the usual symbols of superstition and other matter to which he took exception, with spaces for a daily diary of events. Introducing this almanac, he says: "Fathers and mothers of families are often puzzled to find suitable baptismal names to distinguish their children from others who have the same family names. Henceforth, if they will consult this new almanac, they will find a long list of pretty names, and the signification of them when they are of foreign derivation."

In this way passed the first four years at Waldbach. At this date the fief, which had been under Catholic rule, passed into the hands of a Protestant lord, and Oberlin, writing to his friend, Zeigenhagen, at the time, thus reported it to him:

Sunday, the 7th of April, I gave to Mr. J. J. Tisler, who was going to Rothau, a letter for the pastor Schweighaeuser, requesting him to present himself to the new lord Baron de Dietrich at Strasburg. When Mr. Tisler arrived, he found the people waiting for Mr. Buerle, who wanted to buy Ban-de-la-Roche. The sergeant, who is son-in-law of the solicitor, asked Tisler, "What news?" "A new lord," Tisler replied. "Yes," said the sergeant, "we are waiting for him, Mr. Buerle." "It is not Mr. Buerle," replied Tisler,

"but Baron de Dietrich, as pastor Oberlin has assured us." Thereupon the sergeant accused Tisler of lying: "He knew better." "That is possible," said Tisler, "but I know that our pastor prayed for the old lord and for the new lord, and urged the citizens to have confidence in God," adding that I had named Baron de Dietrich as our future master. Upon hearing that their faces changed color, and they said, "Now, we believe it," and some of the Catholic women wrung their hands and cried, "The Lord help us," and others covered their heads, exclaiming, "Oh, mein Gott, a Huguenot lord!" All Rothau sent their remembrances to me. "Do not fail to tell him that I send my cordial regards," was repeated on every side. They well knew what persecutions they had upon their consciences, and how the Ban-de-la-Roche thus passed out of the hands of a Catholic lord of fief; but the fears of the Catholics were not justified by any reprisals.

The new lord was received with great joy when he arrived at Waldbach in July 1771, and shouts of, "Long live the new lord!" were heard everywhere. Oberlin, followed by his flock, went out to meet him, and young girls sang songs of welcome. This was greatly appreciated, and from that time the baron interested himself in Oberlin and his work. Many wrongs and tyrannies imposed by the former lords were corrected, the taxes were reduced, and the feudal tithes lessened. Baron de Dietrich immediately in-

creased Oberlin's salary by two hundred francs a year, and in many respects the inhabitants of the fief had reason for new courage. It had been a trying but fruitful four years for Oberlin.

IV

MAKING A HOME

IV

MAKING A HOME

(1768)

PREVIOUS to his departure to his mountain parish, Oberlin's mother, mindful of his welfare, advised him to take a wife with him to the parsonage. He had no such purpose for himself, but he was willing to be counseled in a matter quite beyond his contemplated plans, and consented to the accepted theory that " it is not good that the man should be alone," and that with a good wife one's usefulness would be promoted. He received the proposition as a general truth, but confessed that he had no special interest in its particular application. As there was no predilection on his part, his mother, in the usual conventional method of the European countries, became the natural go-between in the matter which so intimately concerned his entire future. Naturally, she thought that a wife who could bring a wholesome portion of earthly

goods with her would not, if other things were equal, be less valuable in the anticipated heavenly relation. The fact that her son appeared to have so little personal interest in the matter was a difficulty which she was confident might be overcome and adjusted. The daughter of a wealthy widow was suggested, and, after conference, the two mothers put their heads together to bring about the match. The young man in the case was informed that the young lady did not regard the possibility ungraciously, and he was encouraged to cultivate friendliness. His passivity and docility in the proceedings did not arise wholly from indifference, but in part from his theory and practise from early youth to submit every judgment to God and to rely upon him for some especially providential indication of his will; a practise which easily may savor of presumption, as at times it did in future cases with Oberlin. Every question with him was a subject for prayer, and this one as yet had never come under his prayerful consideration. Oberlin had never visited the home of the intended lady and appears not even to have known her by sight. On this occasion he prayed that God would be pleased to reveal his will to him, and to direct him in his judgment whether the proposed

marriage would be for his happiness and usefulness or not by the manner in which he should be received. He did not realize the presumption in that he himself should decide in advance what the sign of divine approbation was to be. He resolved that if the mother should herself make the proposition he would regard it as a sign of the divine will that he was to go ahead; but if she did not, he should consider it his duty to draw off without mentioning the subject. A day was appointed for the visit, and the mother of the young lady in question, who had been informed of his coming, was waiting to receive him. Oberlin reached the widow's door in due season and rang the bell. He was received courteously, and the young lady soon came in and was introduced. A general conversation began in the customary terms, and when all the ordinary commonplaces seemed to have been exhausted, the situation became embarrassing. Oberlin waited for the providential indication which he had determined upon, but there was no sign. In dead silence the parties looked at one another, each waiting for the other to intimate in some way the purpose of the interview. As the increasing embarrassment became somewhat serious Oberlin made his decision, and

with the customary courtesies withdrew, leaving mother and daughter without explanation, as if he had simply dropped in to make a pleasant call. This was the conclusion.

Oberlin was doubtless right in his belief that faith had its place in questions of this kind as in all questions, but in this case faith ended with sight. Probably any youth in search of a wife would naturally conclude that the divine will was in the negative when he found that the young lady did not particularly attract him.

It may be said that Oberlin's mother was " cast down, but not destroyed." She knew well that she had a good son who would make a good husband, provided he could once be secured in the matrimonial net. Her next tentative began with an amiable daughter of a former tutor of Oberlin. The tutor knew and highly appreciated Oberlin's character and work, and in this case the young man was attracted to the young lady. The marriage contract was drawn up. Meanwhile, however, a suitor who was wealthy presented himself with such urgency and success that the temporary eclipse of Oberlin followed, and the young lady, after many hesitations, withdrew from her engagement with him. After a few weeks she repentingly felt that she had done this

unwisely, and a note was written by her father to Oberlin expressing their regret for her mistake and intimating his desire that the former relations should be renewed. On the receipt of the note Oberlin at once proceeded to the residence, and returned the note, saying: "My dear sir, I am accustomed to follow the intimations of providence, and from what has recently occurred I am assured that a union with your daughter would promote neither her happiness nor mine. Let us therefore forget what is past, and let me, as of old, share your affection as though no overtures had been made."

This second experience ended in a manner more creditable than the first, but not less than the first indicates Oberlin's characteristic of faith and decisiveness.

Here ended the mother's endeavors to secure for her son a fitting companion. The question was settled, but Oberlin was not. His mother, however, could not consent to her son's departure alone. She accompanied him to Waldbach, settled him, unwived, and left his younger sister Sophia in charge of his new home. Busy with the beginnings of his self-denying life among his poor people, he had neither time nor inclination to turn his thoughts to any further experiments

looking to matrimony. Sister Sophia was all that his heart could wish in making a home a sacred refuge from his cares.

Nevertheless, in that remote and lonely place it was to be expected that this sister Sophia would have many lonely hours, accustomed as she was to Strasburg life; and when a year had been spent in this way she induced her intimate friend, Mlle. Madeline Witter, after a somewhat serious illness, to visit her and try the bracing mountain air for recuperation; this rather against the preferences of Oberlin. Mlle. Witter, who was related to Oberlin on her mother's side, was the daughter of a former professor of the University of Strasburg, but had lost both of her parents at an early age. She was now a well-educated city girl, with far more expensive habits than were approved by Oberlin, of great charm of manner and liveliness of disposition.

Oberlin's severe views of life and the nature of his work were such that the gaiety of the visit was not altogether agreeable to him, and he lost no occasion to express in a kindly way his little disagreements with her apparently less serious attitudes of thought and feeling. Mlle. Witter met his ironies with happy rejoinders; quick of wit, she was not second to him in

repartee, and while neither of them thought it, they were coming to appreciate and enjoy each other in their perfect independence of opinions and ability to defend them. Then came an indication to Oberlin (shall we call it providential?) such as he had not distinctly prayed for, that this gay, witty, charming young woman would be a delightful companion, a real comrade in life. As soon as he realized this he determined to resist the growing intimacy, giving to himself as reasons her joyous temperament, her over-elegant toilet, and her worldly habits. Nor was he unmindful of the declaration he had often heard her make, that she "would never marry a clergyman." The visit continued for some weeks, every day of them weaving the toils closer about them both. Oberlin, in his journal, confesses the conquest that had been made and recorded "two sleepless nights."

While providence continued the intimations in this unsolicited way, the time came when the young lady's immediate departure was at hand. Repeatedly seeking divine guidance, the young pastor looked for signs to indicate God's will. It is recorded that he solemnly declared to God that if he would give him a sign, he would act accordingly. The only sign which came was "an

inner voice that seemed to repeat, 'Take her for your wife.'" He replied to himself, "But it is impossible; our dispositions and our tastes are so dissimilar," and the inner voice reiterated, "Take her for your wife." That the wish was father to the voice is clear enough. The voice was as evidently a real one. It was the voice of his own heart, though Oberlin did not then so interpret it.

He decided at last that this indeed was the intimation of providence, and then he lost no time in obeying the divine will. It was a glad obedience. He sought the lady under the shade of a tree which still stands in the garden, and how his declaration has come down to us in words I know not, but his original biographer and friend, who was assisted by Oberlin's daughter in handing down the romance, writes that Oberlin said: "You are about to leave us, my dear friend, but I have had an intimation that you are destined by divine will to be the partner of my life. If you will resolve upon this step, so important to us both, I expect you will give me your candid opinion about it before your departure."

Let us hope that his biographer and friend did not get correctly all that was said on this occa-

HOME OF OBERLIN AT WALDBACH

Madame Werner-Witz, Oberlin's granddaughter, and her six children on the left. Pasteur Werner, her husband, is looking out of Oberlin's study window, in second story, extreme left.

sion, even if the young missionary may have been enabled to interweave these words into his declaration. We know that Oberlin was accustomed to enter in his diary his daily thoughts, and it is quite possible that in the cool of the evening, with his pen in hand, in the mental reaction after such an experience, he thought that he made these identical remarks. At all events we may be sure that he asked this sweet girl, who had abundant humor and a sense of the ridiculous, to share his life in such a way that she did not laugh at its putting, and without concealing from her that a life of sacrifice, solitude, and poverty went with it. The young woman did not need time to find out what might be the providential intimations for herself. Her heart was already in Oberlin's ownership; she arose, placed one hand before her eyes, and without a word spoken held out the other toward him. He clasped it in his own, and there is no record beyond this.

Oberlin never doubted after that that the intimation came from heaven; and assuredly it did. Their marriage followed soon, July 6, 1768, and Sophia and not Madeline was the one who returned to live at Strasburg. This happy matrimony was not in accord with the conventional

mode formally arranged by parents, but it was a true love marriage. In Oberlin's records we see what an invaluable assistant she became to her husband in his indefatigable labors, tempering his zeal with her prudence and forwarding his plans by her wise cooperation. The qualities which she possessed he needed, and they made her influence of the greatest value. She well fulfilled her part in the endeavors for the betterment of these poor people, identifying herself with all that concerned her husband's vocation, cheerfully meeting his every consecration to the work of God with an equal one of her own. When the infant schools were started, she set the example for others in teaching. When the women of the parish were unwilling to learn to spin cotton in order to help the household earnings, which practise Oberlin introduced, his wife took the new industry in hand and led them on to the profits of it.

A quotation from a letter of Oberlin's well illustrates her spirit. A school had been opened at Dessau in Germany which had greatly interested Oberlin. He considered it in its methods the model school of Germany. One of the professors there received a letter from Oberlin which said: "How I would like to spend weeks near

you, to see and learn everything and return to the Ban-de-la-Roche to make this place in the mountains worthier by your knowledge! While reading your book with my wife we were saying, 'Why do we not have some of the money which is so useless in some hands?' We looked around to see if we could discover anything convertible into money. Suddenly my wife, beaming with joy, brought me a pair of earrings, asking to have them sent to aid your philanthropic institution. They cost her before marriage thirty florins. You can imagine how pleased I was. If the publication of my good little wife's name can influence others to follow her example, we cheerfully consent to it. Perhaps it may induce some other people to make researches in their jewel boxes." Oberlin's life was both richer and stronger for this happy union, and his work from its beginning to its close bears the impress of her loving and beautiful character.

V

A ROAD TO CIVILIZATION

V

A ROAD TO CIVILIZATION

(1771–1773)

THE schools had been organized and supplied with teachers; the next step in civilization was to connect the almost inaccessible villages with the movements of life in the outside world. The people had been so long in their wretched condition that they were quite content to remain in it without disturbance. They never had made roads, and had no wish to begin now. It was more difficult to enlist the sympathy of generous givers in Strasburg, and others outside of the mountain districts, for material improvement than it was to secure help to relieve wants which were mental and spiritual. Oberlin could scarcely expect to appeal to philanthropists for aid to blast rocks and to build bridges. Nevertheless, without roads the people must continue in extreme poverty. There would be no market for their produce, even if they

should undertake to raise it. Nor was there any encouragement for them to introduce improvements in agriculture. During the greater portion of the year the traveled ways which they called roads could not be used on account of landslides and mountain torrents.

First of all, the road to Rothau, the highway to Strasburg, needed to be made safe for constant communication. It was now little more than a by-path, and the river Bruche, which was a torrent when snows melted and the streams were swollen, at such times could not be crossed. A safe road for all seasons meant that a solid wall of stone for nearly a mile and a half along the Bruche should be constructed with a permanent bridge across it at the foot of the hill.

When Oberlin made known his plan to the people, there were no words in their vocabulary to even partially express their amazement. If he had suggested a step-ladder to the moon, they would not have been more astonished. Whatever deprecatory adjectives were in their possession were freely used in their characterization of such an impossible scheme. The preacher was altogether out of his sphere. They positively refused to sustain him. His vocation was preaching. Why should he come to them with exhor-

tations for roads and masonry? Without regard for his feelings or judgment they said: "No; we will not have it. Our pastor may as well understand this now as ever!" This much and more was the answer to Oberlin's plan for good roads.

Ignorant people are never more obstinate in ignorance than when any attempt is made to improve upon practises which have gained the adherence of generations and which they have inherited. It would have been an appropriate time for a less determined man to have tendered his resignation. The irresistible force had evidently run against an immovable object. Oberlin did not propose to run away from difficulties. This was one thing that he did not know how to do. He knew that he was needed in Bande-la-Roche, whether he was wanted or not. He was there to stay. He was there to accomplish. The parishes could not starve him out, for he knew how to starve.

"The road must be made," he said. "It would be useless even if it were made," they replied, "for we could not get across the stream when it is full any better than now." He replied, "We will use the rocks which we blast in making the road for abutments and throw a bridge

across." Their lack of faith in roads was marvelous, but the proposition to bridge their mountain streams utterly confounded them. It confirmed them in the conclusion that their pastor was an unsafe man to follow. Such a departure from the old paths evidently showed them not only the danger of theological studies, but a capacity also for speculative views that would halt at nothing. If their preacher was to persist in these new notions, he must do it alone.

Stuber had characterized them as "an iron-headed people," and Oberlin felt that they were. All the more they needed him, and though their conduct was disquieting, it had not the least effect upon his purpose. After the matter had been discussed and sufficiently considered, and Oberlin had preached on the Lord's Day with his usual earnestness from the text, "There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God," the people with unspeakable astonishment saw their pastor, bright and early Monday morning, with a pick on his shoulder, accompanied by three or four who were loyal to him, passing through the village to begin the road-making. Their wonder grew when they saw him at work, picking and digging and shoveling away stones that he could

not lift with his hands. There was manhood enough among his people to assert itself after such an appeal as this. It was an illustration of applied Christianity altogether new to them, and it was immediately followed by a great revival of practical religion in the village. The next day a score were working with him, the next day following fifty, until by the time they had reached the stream there were no doubters; all believed in good roads, and always had. Probably the last man to join the majority went home and told his wife that the original idea was his own, and that he would have proposed it to Oberlin but for the conviction that ministers ought to confine themselves to the gospel and let the labor question alone. If so, it may be that the trusting soul believed him. I find no record of this hypothetical man, but he must have been there — he always is — and there could scarcely have been an exception in this case to the ordinary experience of late comers in successful reforms.

Oberlin, as if he had been a contractor from his youth up, assigned to each individual an allotted post and gave personal instruction and direction on every side. He did not fail to select the most difficult places for himself and seemed

regardless of the thorns and loose stones which bruised his hands.

With such courage and patience difficulties were removed as the rocks and gravel were. The demonstration of successful work brought renewed appreciation and aid from friends in Strasburg, and in the end a fine road was completed along the course of the Bruche. Streams which often inundate the highways were guided into channels made to receive them and a wooden bridge was constructed. Replaced later by stone, it still bears the name then given it, "Le Pont de la Charité."

Thirty years after this, Oberlin received a letter from the mayor of Rothau, stating that he saw the bridge needed repairs and requesting that the necessary funds should be put to that use. The reply of the man whose experience is above related is characteristic:

Sir, the Mayor, — The bridge — the poor orphan bridge — is named " Bridge of Charity," because after several accidents charity built it; and until now charity has maintained it. There are no other funds which exist for this object.

May God be with you, Sir, the Mayor, and direct you.

Yours,

John Frederic Oberlin.

VI

CALL TO AMERICA

VI

CALL TO AMERICA

(1775)

SEVEN years had passed in this missionary work of laying foundations for better ways of living and better lives in improved conditions when Oberlin was startled by another missionary question as unexpected as his first, and which asked of him a still greater sacrifice.

A colony of German Protestants from Saltzburg in Austria, who had chosen exile instead of the surrender of their faith, had located in the State of Pennsylvania and had given the Scriptural name of "Ebenezer" to their settlement. Early in their history in this new country their pastor and leader had died, and they had appealed to a distinguished theologian at Augsburg to secure for them a successor. Already Oberlin's missionary successes were becoming known to many, notwithstanding his remoteness from observation, and the choice of a leader for

this far-away ministry settled upon this devoted pastor in the mountains. He was urged to take the direction of the colony in America and do for it what he had been doing for the mountaineers of the Vosges. The call of the people exiled for faith's sake appealed deeply to his sympathies. The colony in Ebenezer, with a prospective large development, seemed to offer him a wider scope for his missionary zeal. He submitted the question to his wife, then in delicate health. Her ready response was, "Where thou goest, I will go," and notwithstanding Oberlin's deep interest in his present charge, this seemed to him the call of God.

Letters to his brother and his mother, which follow, appear to have been written under much stress of feeling, and evidently are replies to their appeals to dissuade him, and to have him reconsider his intention. He prefaced the first with these lines:

"Ich will dir einen Alter bauen
Der Ebenetzer heissen soll,
Drauf soll man diese Worte schauen:
Gott fuhret seine Kinder wohl."[1]

[1] "To Thee will I build an altar;
Ebenezer shall be its name,
Thereupon shall be seen these words:
God guides his children well."

Best and dearest of Brothers, — However great the sorrow I feel at the very thought of leaving you and our dear mother, I must nevertheless abide by my determination, to which neither my wife nor myself have been brought by any human influence. The fact that every one stands for or against a deed cannot decide a question of conscience. By baptism I have contracted an alliance with a Master who knows more than I and is more powerful, who has adopted me as his son, who wishes to be my father, but who demands, with filial love and devotion, obedience and submission. . . . I have begged God since my early youth to be my guide always, to make me always see his will and make me docile and faithful. He has done it, and I have not been deceived in my expectations from him. . . . In a multitude of cases I have been able to notice his special leadership. Whenever I was undecided as to what to do, I called upon him for counsel, and it was always granted me in some way or other; considering which I should be a most ungrateful and shameless being if despite the countless fulfilment of his promises I wished suddenly to turn away from him and make my decision influenced by purely worldly interests, by my own convenience or the advice of men.

It is demanded of a man of honor that he act after his own most sincere convictions. In my eyes I would be unworthy of being your brother did I wish to act otherwise, even if the persons who are wrongly thought to have been the cause of my resolution were of an entirely different opinion.

I did tell myself at first that God is blessing my undertaking in this land, and that the good that I might do in Ebenezer is uncertain. But who am I then to have the right to argue thus in opposition? Does not the Lord himself know where to place his servants for the greatest good of his cause? Must I then adore God with my lips only, adding to the number of those who know only how to say, "Lord, Lord;" but if I desire to adore him by doing his will, why should I not go according to his voice?

As soon as I had received the letter in which was the question of this call, I did what I always do in doubtful cases. With entire confidence in his promises I addressed myself to God in the name of Jesus Christ, to beg him ardently to do what he has already done many times for me, and to let me know whether I must say Yes or No. My wife, to whom I had given this letter containing the call — withdrawing without saying a word — did the same, and we both to our mutual surprise soon came to the profound conviction that we must say "Yes, Lord; here we are."

I know only too well that many persons do not know the power of prayer; but I also know that it is not because of any lack of clear and definite promises, nor of any lack of God's faithfulness. If then it be the will of God, as it is our conviction, all other considerations must disappear.

Jesus is the sovereign shepherd of the flock at Ban-de-la-Roche, and always will be, and will know how to give it every time the one who is suited for it for a subordinate pastor.

If he wishes us to serve him at Ebenezer, he who holds the world in his hands will certainly find the means to make us come there; and if we are to die there, he will surely know on the day of resurrection how to find the place where he shall have entrusted us to the sleep of death.

I know well that our intentions and resolutions are regarded by many as fanatical enthusiasm. But what would it matter if they were to see this in our whole conduct? It is enough that I know that I seek earnestly to make my thoughts and actions conform to the holy word which I preach. If people allow themselves some jests at our expense, we are reassured by the words of the Holy Scripture, "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven." Besides, we are fortified by other passages like this: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me." . . . I must end. Will you ask me why I have gone into so many details? Surely, rather more for my own sake than for yours, dear brother, whose righteousness I know, for I know you like to be useful to me, and you can be in this case by communicating this letter to all those who regard my decision from a false point of view.

Farewell, and never fail to love less than you have done all your life the one whom you have loved with the most ardent and changeless affection, though he be

on the other hemisphere, your antipode, nevertheless your faithful younger brother,

JOHN FREDERIC OBERLIN, *Pastor.*

AUTUMN, 1774.

In the letter to his mother, which is lengthy and more in detail, portions strictly relating to his family experiences are omitted.

MY DEAR MOTHER, — Several dear friends say that in my letter to my brother I have failed to prove that it is according to God's will that I should go to Ebenezer. They are right. All that I wish to show in the letter is that as a Christian, I could answer only in the affirmative when I was asked if I were willing to accept the call. I know that it does not necessarily follow that God wishes one so disposed to go.

Oberlin next refers to the changes in his life plans in going to the mountains instead of taking the army chaplaincy, saying, "What the Lord wants is the willing heart." He continues:

The same thing can happen in regard to Ebenezer. That is, I cannot prove that it is the will of God that I should go there. I cannot prove it until I am there, or at least until I am on the way. God is my Father, and all I have to do is to go where he tells me, like an obedient child. This is what I have tried to do up

to this time. I still think that I must reply in the affirmative for the following reasons:[1]

Second. Since I have taken a more direct path in the kingdom of Jesus Christ and have acquired a more special knowledge of the human mind, my heart has been filled with pity for so many people, blind pagans, who cost our Lord the same sacrifice as we others in Strasburg and to whom it has not even been given to taste the crumbs that fall from our table. These feelings have inspired me to help such as much as lay within my power. Strasburg is a nursery for the clergy, among whom there are many excellent men. How different it is in Asia, in Africa, and in America! Our Lord taught his disciples to consider humanity everywhere as the hardest field. His doctrines form our belief; but do our actions respond to them? Do we work with the ardor Christianity demands for the well-being of all the world? How many excellent things could be done, how many thousands of souls could enjoy in Jesus Christ the blessings which have fallen to our lot, if with the mind of Christ we embraced a larger sphere with generous effort! These souls abandoned by our selfishness, would they not then fall to our care? How many times have I prayed the Lord to dispose of me, and of the children he might give me, and to make use of us where according to his plans we would be the most useful! Ebenezer is a German and Lutheran parish, but there are in its near neighborhood four tribes of Indians which have daily

[1] For the sake of brevity the first reason, which has been already given in the letter to his brother, is omitted.

connection with it. One meets there, moreover, a great number of wretched Africans who serve as slaves.

Third. To learn languages one must have a good memory; mine has always been poor. I have found it difficult to acquire languages which do not have analogy with the German or Latin. I know I would meet with great difficulty in learning the Indian language sufficiently well to be able to give instruction in that tongue, but I could do much good indirectly in forming institutions and in setting up schools for young negroes.

Fourth. The poor condition of the parish of Ebenezer has deeply moved me. The duties of a pastor are very laborious there. The plantations are separated from one another by considerable distances. The roads are bad and difficult for travel. The parish in this condition is like an orphan since the death of their worthy pastor, Bolzius. The schools need to be reformed, and the Ban-de-la-Roche has enabled me to acquire some knowledge of the subject.

I could also profitably use the experience which I have acquired here, in founding at Ebenezer different establishments for their material and temporal development as well as for their religious and spiritual necessities.

Fifth. The parish at Waldbach is in much more fortunate condition than that of Ebenezer. It has now at its head a Protestant lord who approves and encourages the improvements already made. These improvements are already far enough advanced for a conscientious successor with only moderate talents to

continue. Besides, Ban-de-la-Roche has always a commander and friend in Mr. Stuber who will not cease giving it his paternal attachment. . . .

My conscience tells me that I pray God not that he may let me stay here, nor make me go, but only that his will may be done, and that his kingdom may come, and that I may submit entirely to his order.

I am, and will remain till death and after, dear mother,

Your obedient,

JOHN FREDERIC.

BEGINNING 1775

Having settled the question in his own mind, he prepared himself with great care for his mission across the sea. He examined geographies and books on travel such as he could secure concerning America. He took numerous notes and drew up a plan of action for his new sphere of activities. In anticipation of his departure he prepared a farewell letter to his parish, intending to have it printed in a little booklet as a souvenir and sent to them at his embarkment. To communicate across the sea and get replies to questions necessary to perfect the arrangements required time, and at the very last, when all had been adjusted and Oberlin was ready for departure, word came from America that war

between the States and the mother country was imminent; this was soon followed by the intelligence that the conflict had begun in earnest, and was active in the very State to which he was going, and that his ministry would be liable to the interruptions of war. Certainly his missionary plans for education and development in the new country could not now be carried out. It was plain to him and to all that he must wait upon the issues of the war, — a sad disappointment, as he had fully consecrated himself to what he was confident was the will of God.

The farewell letter, here translated, found among his papers after his death, never came to the knowledge of his mountain parish.

To the Parishes of Waldbach in the Country of Ban-de-la-Roche:

My very dear Brothers, beloved Parishioners, — The faithful servant of Jesus Christ, to whose generous care we owe the translation and printing of this handsome booklet, has requested me to dedicate it to you and say my last farewell.

What satisfaction it is to me to be able again to speak to you by writing, now that I can no longer do it by mouth! This is at last the day of which I have spoken to you so many times, to make you more attentive to what I have preached to you in the name of my Master.

The day of our separation! With what peace of mind I could leave you if I knew you were all in the hands of that faithful Saviour from whom I know that neither the world nor the power of hell would be able to snatch you away — unless you yourselves separated yourselves from him!

Oh, hasten yet, you who have neglected up to this time to accept him; hasten while yet your hearts are touched, hasten to prostrate yourselves at the feet of Jesus your Redeemer and beg his pardon for your sinful disregard.

Offer your hearts to him, just as they are; supplicate him to change them and make them such as he wishes them to be.

Never forget what he himself has said and caused his faithful apostles to say — which I have often repeated to you — that one cannot be saved unless he is regenerated; born anew, according to St. John 3, and animated by his Spirit (Rom. 8:9, 14); that we must be united to him as the branch to the tree, and continually draw from him the strength for a holy life; that all we do out of harmony with him, however beautiful and noble it may appear in the eyes of the world — honest in a pagan fashion — is of no value in his eyes because the motive is not love and gratitude toward him, who has done everything for our salvation and has deserved that we should do everything for him, and for the advancement of his kingdom. St. John xv.

Oh, my dear flock, you whom the sovereign pastor has deigned to entrust to me now for eight years, I

implore you attach yourselves to the divine pastor and never to men.

Men are in his hands, and he is always able to give you good faithful workers unless through lack of faith and obedience toward him you render yourselves unworthy of it.

The Lord of the harvest now calls me, contrary to my expectations, far from you to guard another one of his flocks which has cost him the same price as you, but which is in need of what many among you have held in too slight esteem; and they have no way to meet their need.

We shall be separated as to the body, but I hope we shall not be so by spirit. I have always tenderly loved you. I love you still, and all the world's treasures would not have accomplished what the command of my divine Lord has done, — I mean, to make me leave you. But I shall never forget you. Oh, do not forget me either. Do not forget the exhortations and words of the Holy Scriptures which I have unceasingly repeated to you. Do not forget to implore God's blessing on the discourses which I shall address to my new flock on the other side of the sea, and know that what you shall ask of the Father in the name and for the kingdom of Jesus he will grant unto you, and that all the blessings he will grant to my American flock because of your prayers will add to the brilliancy of the crowns you have won by your zeal.

Farewell then, dear, my most dear Parishes. We shall evidently not see each other again until we see each other before the throne of the Lamb, where, filled

with rapture for all his great and divine goodness, we will give eternal praise, honor, and thanksgiving for all unto Him. Amen.

J. F. Oberlin.

Written this 177–

These letters represent Oberlin's thought, feeling, and expression at this period of his life. It is impossible to read his farewell letter without sharing in the deep disappointment which came to him in the relinquishment of what he supposed was an accomplished fact. The colony at Ebenezer scattered and failed. We cannot know what might have been its history with such an organizer and leader as Oberlin; but it was proved to be no cause for regret that it was God's good pleasure that he should remain where his uncompleted missionary lessons should not be interrupted.

Oberlin had always felt the deepest interest in America. He carefully collected from every available source facts about the country, which he kept in a special portfolio made by himself for the purpose. On this he pasted one of his printed texts — such as he distributed when he called on his people as a reminder of his call and the date, with these words: "He which

soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully."

When it became known beyond the mountains that the war between the colonies and the mother country had detained Oberlin, efforts were made to detach him from the work which he had proposed to surrender by offers of commanding positions from several churches, but disappointed as he was, nothing could tempt him from missionary service. His reply to an influential church with its generous salary was, "The best work for me is where I can do the most good with the least recompense."

From that time he bent every energy to the work in hand. Baron de Dietrich, lord of the district, now caused the church at Fouday, the same which is still standing, to be built for Oberlin without expense to the parish, and in many ways showed his appreciation and high esteem for the good missionary who was bringing new life to the fief.

VII

BEREAVEMENT AND RENEWED CONSECRATION TO PUBLIC WELFARE

VII

BEREAVEMENT AND RENEWED CONSECRATION TO PUBLIC WELFARE

(1784)

IN 1784 the death of his beloved wife had a most powerful influence both upon the direction of the thoughts and feeling of Oberlin and upon the whole course of his future. Nothing had prepared Oberlin for his bereavement. He was struck as by a thunderbolt, and for some time it seemed impossible for him to recover himself. In his diary we read: "I prayed the Lord continually to let me die and be buried with her. God, who sent this terrible blow, treated me with great kindness, as a delirious patient whom one seeks to recall slowly to his senses." At length, however, after an interval of melancholy stupor, as he recorded, "I experienced the merciful assistance of God, notwithstanding my overwhelming sorrow." From that time no complaint, no murmur ever

escaped his lips. Every day he seemed to walk in communion with her and to be conscious of her presence. He constantly looked forward to the time when they should be reunited, and the desire for this never left him in the succeeding years. More than ever he lived as a citizen of the other world. He never ceased to believe that his wife watched over him and daily influenced him.

The management of his household and the care of his children were undertaken by Louise Schlepler, who had come as a teacher and who had lived in the Oberlin household for eight years. She remained in this capacity as a friend rather than as one in service during the life of Oberlin, and her grave is beside his in the churchyard at Fouday.

Oberlin's profound sorrow did not cause him to relax his efforts for the redemption of his people; he rather redoubled them, in order that he might be found faithful when the moment of his departure from this life, which he longed for, should arrive. He sought to use every day as if it were to be his only day. Realizing that all permanent advancement of the people in their modes of life depended upon their improvement in agriculture, he brought to this

end every stimulus which he could command. Organizing an agricultural club, he presided over it. He introduced new vegetables and gave instruction as to their cultivation. He investigated with the greatest care the nature of the soil and learned what it was adapted to produce. By the study of books and by correspondence he sought the most improved methods of culture and made careful inquiries as to the best productions of similar soil and climate in Europe. He procured flaxseed from Riga on the shores of the Baltic, and clover-seed from Holland. The potato, which had been previously introduced but had practically failed to pay for its planting, was thrown aside and a new and excellent kind was brought from one of the provinces of France.

A daughter of Oberlin testifies: "The cultivation of the potato was rare at the beginning of my father's ministry. As in other places, there was fear that this vegetable might be hurtful. In the spring the ordinary food was wild herbs cooked with milk; and people were extremely embarrassed if their neighbors saw the potato used as a food. It was eaten on the sly. They were always careful, if any one entered during a meal, to cover the dish, so that it might not be known."

Giving this cultivation of the potato his personal care, he soon saw the people exporting from their successful crop to the people in the valleys. New grasses also were procured. Lectures were given upon the value of fertilizers, showing the people how to collect fertilizing material and how to apply it; how to drain their meadows, how to protect them from the washings of mountain torrents, and how thus to prevent the wasting of their lands. Much waste land was in this way brought into use and enclosed.

In his appeal to the villages for the irrigation of their fields, which came to be done with thoroughness and great advantage, he makes his scheme a religious duty. "I beg all those who do not contribute with all their ability and influence to make the needful arrangements for a just and brotherly system of watering the meadows, to consider that the love of God and of one's neighbor is the sum of all the commandments." Many of their grass-lands, for lack of irrigation, were cultivated to so little purpose that it is said the wife could carry home in her apron all the hay her husband could mow in half a day. He urged them to put aside their rude agricultural implements, himself buying

better and more modern ones from Strasburg, to be paid for by the people on instalments.

Never was there a more practical utilitarian in missions. Nothing escaped his indefatigable attention. Nothing was beneath it. His ardor and enthusiasm were only surpassed by the patience and prudence which he used in inducing his parishioners to adopt his suggestions. No sooner was his agricultural club at work than he added a horticultural society and began to create nurseries, from which he distributed young plants, selecting the trees more appropriate for the climate.

But with all the religious exhortation, attached to his instructions in farming, tree planting, and the care of cattle, he never lacked those who opposed him step by step. They could not understand how a man born and bred in a city could get any wisdom worth their consideration along the lines of their own experience. They had become convinced against their will that he had discovered something about road-making, but that he should presume to a knowledge above theirs in practical farming, the care of land and the culture of it, roused resentful objections continually. Every proposition must needs be demonstrated before it would be accepted.

His success with his fields and fruit trees and garden was his answer to their questionings. Belonging to the parsonage were two barren fields which had always been noted for the poorness of their soil, and through which was a much frequented thoroughfare. His agricultural neighbors smiled and wagged their heads knowingly when their parson began to turn this poor land into a nursery of fruit trees, intending to make it an orchard. They saw him deeply trench the ground and fill it with suitable soil. Next, he procured approved scions of apples, pears, cherries, and other fruits. His watch and care, his judicious thinning out and pruning upon a field thought to be unfit for any profitable use, brought a fruitful orchard in a few years as his justification. The excellent fruits, such as were new to the locality, before the eyes of all the passers-by spoke for themselves and for him. With all their inherited ideas and lack of ideas, they were once more convinced that Oberlin knew something besides his theological certainties, and gradually became more willing to take his piety and practical utility mixed, as they were indeed in generous doses.

So earnest was Oberlin in the material better-

ment of his villages that his steadfast friend, Stuber, in Strasburg, wrote him a second letter, warning him lest his regard for these practicalities should crowd upon his spiritual duties. Oberlin was the last man on the face of the earth who needed that caution! It was this very personal contact with the every-day world and his interest in meeting every-day wants that protected him from a natural mysticism and from a tendency to fanaticism. These duties for the neglected poor were so many safety-valves for his fervent spirit. By directing his zeal and enthusiasm from that which is purely spiritual into healthful channels and engaging his extraordinary earnestness in ordinary affairs, his balance of thought and feeling were preserved and kept sound. All that he did and urged upon his people was included in his interpretation of the ministry of the gospel. Religious motives were underneath all his instructions and plans, and were invariably in evidence. In his directions for irrigation, for example, he added, "Our Lord died for us; let us live for him," and one of the rules of the horticultural society was, "Each member should try to distinguish himself by Christian conduct, brotherly kindness, consideration, and politeness towards his fellows."

Take, for example, a direction to his people on planting trees, sent to them in a circular letter:

Dear Friends, — Satan, the enemy of mankind, rejoices when we demolish and destroy. Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the contrary, rejoices when we labor for the public good. You all desire to be saved by him and hope to be partakers of his glory. Please him then by all possible means.

He is pleased when from a principle of love you plant trees for the public benefit. Now is the season. Be willing then to plant them. Plant them also in the best possible manner. Remember that you do it to please Him. Put all your roads in good condition. Ornament them. Use some of your trees for this purpose and attend to their growth.

Another circular, curious and characteristic, reads:

Dear Friends of Fouday, — Several persons at Zolbach have long desired that the road between Fouday and Zolbach, in your district, should be mended and put in good repair. Such a measure would be greatly for the advantage of Fouday. But for whose sake will you do it? Will you do it from love to your heavenly Father? Will you do it from love to the Lord Jesus Christ, who during his stay upon earth went about doing good and who redeemed us to be a peculiar people zealous of good works? Will you do it from

love to God's children at Zolbach? Will you do it from a compassion to the animals which your heavenly Father has created? etc.

Another circular, from his own press, asked these questions among others: "Do you punctually contribute your share towards repairing roads? Have you planted upon the common at least twice as many trees as there are heads in your family? Have you planted them properly, or only as idle and ignorant people would do to save themselves trouble? Have you proper drains in your yards for carrying off the refuse water? Do you keep a dog unless there is absolute necessity?" Oberlin was thus constantly reminding the people of their daily duties as a part of their Christian life.

This every-day attention to schools, to parish work, to roads and lands and cattle and trees did not exhaust his plans. When he entered upon his mission there was not a mechanic in the entire district. He set the example in this direction with a workshop of his own, where he had a turner's lathe, a complete set of carpenter's tools, a printing-press, and a bookbindery. In connection with his schools he selected those in whom he discovered mechanical tastes and

had them trained as shoemakers, blacksmiths, carpenters, glaziers, painters, and masons. Such as he could not provide with instruction at home he sent to Strasburg, that they might learn their trades and return to teach others; and greatly to his satisfaction, he succeeded finally in inducing the sons of a prosperous manufacturer at Basle in Switzerland to establish a branch of their ribbon factory at Fouday, which furnished the young women of the villages with regular and profitable employment.

One reason for the distressing condition of the people as Oberlin found them was their custom of constantly mortgaging their future, always anticipating their scanty crops, which kept them in peonage because of their debts. It was a great victory over established thriftlessness when he succeeded in putting an end to this, and in getting those whose lives were burdened with special obligations square with the world. He did not cease his exhortations to this end. "You are not living Christian lives until you have paid all your debts, your royal and your feudal taxes, the weaver, the schoolmaster, the carpenter, the nailmaker, the grocer, the workman, all. But it is not enough to pay one's debts. One must avoid making others."

Another phase of his wise philanthropies was his organization of practical charities. "The poor ye have always with you," said our Lord; and here, while many were rising above their extreme poverty, there were those who could not, or did not, succeed in getting beyond want. The wolf was ever at their door. To help such Oberlin organized, presided over, and directed a "Charity Society," giving it his personal care, that the funds raised for the sick and infirm and worthy needy ones should not aid or encourage indolence or preventable want; and he was very insistent that all applications should have most careful investigation. In every case an answer was strictly required as to the cause of the necessity. Had the applicant been careful to live within his means? Had he paid his debts when he could? Had he contributed to the relief of his fellow parishioners aforetime? Had he learned to practise some handicraft? Had his children been taught at school to work?

Complaints were naturally made of the strictness of some of his conditions; hence attached to the interrogations were explanations and reasons for them, with instructions in behalf of the industry and of better management and prudence.

Thus his work went on, while he was personally developing agriculture; personally looking after mechanical industries; personally superintending clubs and organizing charities, with regular and personal visitations from house to house with advice and counsel, encouraging the people in their new habits of industry and thrift. Meanwhile the poor people, whom he had found in physical destitution and equally poor in social life, were year by year realizing their condition and raising their standards of living. They were even speaking in a different language. Their rude patois of Lorraine dialect with its strong guttural had given way in all the younger people to a pure and correct French, and they could write it accurately. The schools were well taught. The churches had thoughtful attendants. Good roads had taken the places of ways that were little more than by-paths. Farmers were no longer without suitable tools and implements. Their crops were rewarding them. There were mechanics capable for all home work and able to take apprentices. More than all in this varied, anxious, increasing care, the pastor had never neglected his study. His pulpit preparation was made with scrupulous attention. What he could not do by day he did while others slept. This

kind of sacrificial life had now gone on for twenty-two years, sixteen of which were shared with his most noble and devoted wife. Great had been the faith and patience and great the toil. Great also had been the achievement until now, at the age of forty-nine years, came a new and wider experience.

VIII

DURING THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

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(1789–1795)

WHILE Oberlin was devoting himself to the immediate interests under his eye, the French Revolution came. Louis XV had left to his successor a fierce and deadly hatred among the suffering French people towards the throne and the privileged orders. His scandalous and corrupt misgovernment had earned for him the contempt as well as the maledictions of his subjects, and had begotten a criticism of all existing institutions, political and domestic. The agitation was felt even in the remote hills of the Vosges.

Jean Jacques Rousseau, with his specious air of philanthropy, was developing his ideas on the reconstruction of society with the charm of style which was particularly attractive to the French people, but which was subtly undermining the

foundations both of religion and of government. The court and privileged orders, given over to their corrupt pleasures, were too blind to see the signs of the times.

Louis XVI had come to the throne at the time when Oberlin was preparing for his intended mission in the New World. Louis XV, his contemptible predecessor, bequeathed to him, not only the impending danger, but also left him totally uninstructed in the knowledge of government, the affairs of state, and the duties of his future station. Under these conditions the spirit of lawlessness, which soon manifested itself in the cities, became insurrection and spread rapidly into the provinces. Peasants declared themselves against landed proprietors, and a general abrogation of the ancient feudal constitution and rights which had obtained for many centuries in France was voted.

The French Assembly was framing a new constitution, which was to abolish privilege and sweep away whatever feudalism still existed. The "Declaration of the Rights of Man," which at this time appealed to the French people and which ranks, as Madame de Staël wrote, side by side with the "English Bill of Rights" and the American "Declaration," in the times which

followed became a part of Oberlin's experience and history.

He had all the youth of his parishes commit this Declaration of Rights to memory. Every week they were to recite it regularly:

All men are born and continue free and equal in rights. Social distinctions are purely conventional.

Society is an association to preserve the natural rights of man.

Sovereignty resides in the nation. All authority vested in an individual or in a body of men comes expressly from the nation.

Liberty is the power of doing what we will, so long as it does not injure another; the only limits of each man's natural rights are such as to secure the same rights to others; these limits are determinable only by the law.

The law can forbid only such actions as are mischievous to society. "Quod lex non vetat, permittit."

Law is the expression of the general will; all citizens have equal rights according to their fitness to fulfil all offices in the state.

Accusation, arrest, detention, can only be in accordance with the law.

The law must be reasonable; it must have no retroactive force.

Every one must be deemed innocent till he has been convicted; persons under arrest on suspicion must therefore be treated gently.

All men are free to hold what religious views they

will, provided they are not subversive to the public order.

Freedom of speech, of writing and printing, save in cases reserved by law, is one of the most precious of the rights of man.

A public force is needed to guarantee the rights of man.

To support such a force, a common contribution is necessary, which is to be equally levied on all citizens according to their means.

Society has a right to demand from every public servant an account of his administration.

Property being an inviolable and sacred right, no one can be deprived of it save when public necessity, legally established, demands it, and then only with the conditions of a just and previously determined indemnity.

This certainly was a strong dose of patriotism for Oberlin's young people, — young women as well as young men. They were the chief principles out of which the Revolution grew. They did not contemplate the destruction of the monarchy, but they did mean that it should be limited and the people safeguarded. Louis XVI was not ready to become a constitutional king, and the revolutionary tide rose with a force not to be controlled. He had now to deal, not with the people, but with the Revolution. In the name

of "Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity" the cry arose, "Death to the Tyrant! Death to him or to us!" and it did not cease until the ill-starred king went to the guillotine in the Place de la Révolution.

The mountaineers, rejoicing in the downfall of feudalism and in the promises of human rights, proposed to do their part in welcoming the change, and with popular festivities celebrated their relief, usually held on one or another of the mountain tops.

Oberlin was patriot as well as prophet. Realizing the hopeless condition of his country if the principles of liberty should fail to rest upon religion, he sought to hold the mountaineers to a true conception of patriotism. He presided over their celebrations in order to direct them, and to give them the solemn and serious character which rightly belonged to them. He was sure to be with them, leading them in prayer for their distracted country.

On the 13th of November, 1791, following the fête of the Constitution, the people of the district came together in the church at Fouday. Oberlin handed the mayors of the different villages their badges of office, and reminded them that though these badges which they were to wear were light

burdens, the duties which they represented were not light. As they had newly come to office, he counseled them to keep themselves upright and without moral blemish, and lifting his hand heavenward, prayed "that the immense giants of the aristocracy might be crushed, that the Lord would make his face to shine upon the friends of the Constitution, that the people might be worthy of the new order of things about to be established, and that righteous peace might come to France under the scepter of Jesus Christ."

All this time Austria, Prussia, Piedmont, and Spain could scarcely keep their hands off this French frontier of Alsace. Its people were living under the constant threat of these powers. A special pretext for hostilities soon arose out of the grievances of certain petty German princes whose inherited claims to feudal jurisdiction in the Vosges had now been swept away by the action of France, and who demanded restitution. This led to a declaration of war early in 1792.

Responding to a call for volunteers, many young men of Oberlin's parishes, encouraged by their pastor, enlisted. He assembled them at the church and urged them to be good soldiers and

to carry with them the thought at all times that God was their leader and defender. "If you are called to your country's aid in foreign service, remember that we are not enemies of the people whom we withstand. They are as much to be pitied as we are for the tyranny of the princes who have brought war upon them and upon us. Be therefore compassionate towards every one everywhere. Carry the love of God in your hearts and in all your thoughts. Obtain through constant prayer the power to love men with all your hearts, and God will be with you in the foreign land and bring you safely back to your home. But if any should be called to find his grave far from here, if he is where God and duty led him, he will be, when called, nearer heaven."

Oberlin did not know then that his own son, his eldest son, bearing his name, Frederic, a youth of much promise, at the time a medical student looking forward to the mission of his life, would be one of the first to fall in battle. For the execution of a specially dangerous service a volunteer was called for; as might have been expected from his father's son, he volunteered and gave up his life.

Events were now moving very swiftly in

France. The war which had begun under the king was all the more urgent under the Republic. The army sent a deputation to the revolutionary convention in session to thank it "for having reduced them to the necessity of conquering." It was war without now, and a "Reign of Terror" within. "If 1789 was the revolution of justice, 1793 was the revolution of hatred," wrote Jules Simon. It had come to this, a revolution of hatred, and the far-away hills of the Vosges were not too remote to realize their share of it. With the government of Robespierre and the Jacobins, the religion of Jesus Christ was formally proscribed and all Christian worship was prohibited. There was to be no God and there were to be no churches. During these dreadful times almost all men of learning were arrested. Pastors saved their lives by flight. The brother of Oberlin was in prison. Oberlin himself was compelled to close his church and his life was in peril, but he determined to remain where he was. His foresight found him with a mechanic's license which he had obtained a year previous, not knowing then what might eventuate. As an artisan, he immediately organized a club named "The People's Society," and arranged for a meeting with the club in the

discontinued churches. A board was selected from the people of the villages and the gatherings were held in strict parliamentary form. Some motion concerning the public welfare would be considered, when the president of the club would invite Oberlin to remark upon it. This gave him an opportunity to whip Satan soundly without calling him by name, and to expound the Beatitudes and the teachings of "The Sermon on the Mount" without directly indicating their source and inspiration. He thus records his condition: "I was prohibited all public functions by the revolutionary government, and I established a club in the place of divine service to enable us to continue our assembly." Its formation is thus given: "When the National Convention passed its decree prohibiting public worship and requiring a 'Public Orator' to enforce the principles of liberty and to denounce the tyrant, a meeting of the people was held, a club was formed, and one of the schoolmasters was elected president. He at once proposed citizen Oberlin as the Public Orator, which was carried unanimously. 'Now,' said the Orator, 'the next business is to fix a place and a day of meeting. It seems to me that there is no place in all this district so convenient as that

which has been heretofore used for public worship.' This was approved. 'As to the day of assembly,' continued the Orator, 'we cannot fix Monday, Wednesday, or Friday because they are market days at Strasburg; what do you think of the old Sunday at nine o'clock in the morning?' This was carried unanimously. Accordingly, on the next Sunday, the citizen Orator used the pulpit as a tribune, and beginning by reading the National Convention Decree, proceeded as follows: 'According to this decree, I am to exhort you against *the tyrants*, and we are to confer for their destruction. Here in our peaceful valley we certainly have no such tyrants as the Convention describes, and it would be useless for me to speak about them. But I can name and describe to you other tyrants who live not only in this valley but in your own houses, aye, even in your hearts. These tyrants are hatred, avarice, impurity, fleshly lusts, impiety, and pride. These are the tyrants I shall denounce here, and I shall confer with you on the best means of bringing them down. I believe the best and the only means now and to all eternity are repentance towards God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.'" In this form he met the "Decree."

FOUDAY CHURCH AND FACTORY (ONE OF OBERLIN'S CHARGES)

Madame de Stein, in her *Souvenirs of Alsatia,* gives some picturesque details of one of these club meetings:

Desiring to be present at one of these, we determined to go to Fouday. When we arrived, the people were already assembled at the parish church. We found the benches all occupied by club men, excise officers, and women. Above and all around is a gallery where the organ was, and the young people were. The pulpit was at the right. The service had begun. The hymns had already been sung, to our regret. We shared the benches. The examination of the boys and girls was at that moment on "The Rights of Man," which they knew by heart. The girls answered questions with gentleness and modesty, but the boys, with such martial tones that I felt they would know how to defend their rights and be guardians of liberty. It reminded me of the chorus of young and old men in ancient Greece.

The President arose, read the minutes of the last meeting, and referred to a discourse which one of the members had made at a previous meeting — which actually was a sermon of Oberlin's — and called upon him to finish what he had not then time to say. Oberlin, who was in a corner upon the bench, among the club members, took off his great cloak and went upon the improvised tribune, and in a very natural manner led in prayer, such as it is customary to offer before divine service. Then followed a most Christian sermon, well adapted to his listeners. I admired

him, for it took courage to speak so plainly. I was glad indeed to hear this good Oberlin. I found united in him a holy enthusiasm with a frank and original expression which appealed to my heart. Every one knelt in prayer, and the women for the most part bowed their heads in their hands.

A subsequent visit at his house by Madame de Stein is thus related:

Brought to speak upon the burning topic of the day — the pending Revolution — he thus expressed himself: "All that has happened to us reminds me of a Saturday when the cleaning up begins for Sunday. The furniture is taken out of the room and everything is turned upside down. They dust, they beat; and the disorder is terrible. One finds himself in a cloud of dust, so that it is impossible to breathe in the dirty place. Many things are broken; legs of chairs come off, and the like, but all will be mended — though at added expense — and made firm again. Meanwhile the parlor is cleansed, and the furniture one thing after another restored. Cleanliness and order come out of the disorder and are the results of the dreadful upheaval. Sunday comes, and all is fair and shiny. The master returns from his absence and finds the place better than it was on Friday.

This was a cheerful way in which to reassure the good lady. But Oberlin's heart was bleeding when he said it. He was bearing the

loss of his first-born in great sorrow, yet with entire submission to God's providence. The fearful and awful conditions of the Revolution were with him and heavy upon his heart night and day. It was his wisdom, however, to talk optimistically to his guest, and it was his firm belief that out of the bitter experiences would come the "rights of man." The Abbé Gregoire, a Catholic ecclesiastic in France, of much distinction, learned about Oberlin's patriotism and entered into correspondence with him. Oberlin fully sympathized with his Catholic brother, who rejoiced because he had seen in France "the whole infamous race of kings exterminated: they have done only harm. I would prefer the ten plagues of Egypt to a king."

This "Society of the People" attracted the attention of the Jacobins. They suspected that the Ban-de-la-Roche, and particularly Oberlin's house, served as a refuge to those who had fled for safety during the "Terror" in Paris. Hence, the parsonage had several visits of gendarmes who were looking for offenders. A handful of revolutionary tyrants from Strasburg established what they called *La Propagande Révolutionnaire* and in a spirit of impious atrocity began a circuit with a traveling guillotine, and put to death

whom they pleased. It is said that fifty thousand Alsatians took refuge in Germany.

It was at this time that the Marseillaise Hymn was born in the home of Baron de Dietrich, then mayor of Strasburg and lord of the fief, which included the parishes of Oberlin. He was the son of Oberlin's special patron and was Oberlin's friend. Rouget de Lisle, a young officer of engineers who was wont to relieve the tediousness of his garrison life by writing verses and the music for them, was a guest of the mayor, who said to the company, "Strasburg will soon have a patriotic fête, I am thinking, and De Lisle must bring us one of his hymns that will carry his ardent feelings to the souls of the people." De Lisle found his way to his lodgings and began to give utterance to his thoughts, singing altogether and writing nothing. In the morning (April 25, 1792) the chant of the night returned to him; he wrote down the words, made the notes of music, and ran to Dietrich's. They called together some friends. One of the young ladies played while De Lisle sang. The hymn of the nation was found; De Lisle named it "The War Song for the Army of the Rhine," and the band of the National Guard played it on Sunday, four days later. It was

received with immense enthusiasm. It flew from town to town through all the orchestras, and in two months it had reached Marseilles, where the clubs adopted it and renamed it after their city. It was called "the liquid fire of the Revolution." To Oberlin's great grief the unhappy Dietrich, a few months after the notes were first sung in his own home, marched to its accompaniment to the scaffold, and De Lisle himself only escaped death by flight into the hiding-places of the Jura mountains. These were the days when Oberlin was in great personal peril and when he was visited from Strasburg by an official, afterwards supposed to be St. Just, who spent the night at Oberlin's house. He appears to have satisfied himself that the man who had demitted his clerical functions and become a mechanic might safely be permitted to retain his head. At one time Oberlin's house was searched when a refugee was within, but who was not discovered, owing to the tact and marvelous coolness of Oberlin. The officers left him with ample apologies for their intrusion, while the suspect was within hearing of their regrets for the unnecessary visit. The tact and courage of Oberlin in these trying times is seen in an address made in 1794 to the younger members of his flock:

"I desire," he said in his address, "that the people of the French Republic should be animated by truly republican sentiments. I wish them to understand that every individual ought to live for the public good. We are republicans when from love to the public we endeavor both by precept to stimulate our children to active beneficence and to seek to render them useful to others by attending to such pursuits as are likely to increase the public prosperity.

"We are republicans when we endeavor to imbue the minds of our children with such knowledge as may be likely in mature life to make them useful in the station they are called to occupy, and when we teach them to love their neighbors as themselves.

"We are republicans when we preserve our children from that self-interested spirit — which at the present time seems to have gained more ascendency than ever — when so many care only for themselves and labor for the public good only as they are compelled to do so. Ah, far from us be this infernal spirit, as anti-republican as it is anti-Christian."

He concluded his address by praying for all true republicans. The aptitude with which he blended his political and religious admonitions revealed the man. He escaped the Terrorists by proclaiming his republican sentiments, but he managed to work in a good deal of sound preaching in the way in which he did it.

He took his chances, however. In due time

he was summoned to Strasburg for examination. His statement before the judges was: "In my instruction I always restricted myself to that which would help my brothers and make them good patriots, good fathers, zealous republicans, faithful and praiseworthy citizens in every circumstance. I gave up at a meeting of the people a while ago the neckband and cloak which I formerly wore. I always disliked these vain distinctions. As to royalty, it had to be abolished, and I began several years ago to inspire my hearers with republican sentiments." He was allowed to continue "The Society of the People." But later on the second summons came, this time held before the mayor and the municipal council of Fouday, and Oberlin there signed the following declaration: "I recognize that the universality of the citizens of France is a sovereign authority. I promise to obey and submit to the laws of the republic."

Still, he remained under suspicion. On the 28th day of July, 1794, while at the house of a citizen of Waldbach to celebrate a christening, a revolutionary commissioner appeared with an order of arrest. The next morning, escorted by the officer and also by many of his dismayed parishioners, he was walking on his way to

Valle de Ville. On his arriving at Schlestadt *en route* he was consigned under guard with the pastor of Rothau, who was arrested with him, to a little inn for the night. At the hotel table were seated Jacobin functionaries, who took occasion to pour their contempt upon evangelical belief. This was more than Oberlin could stand, and called forth from him such vigorous defense that it was said the best place for him would be the military prison at Besançon. He would undoubtedly have arrived there, but at that instant the startling news came of the fall of Robespierre. His head had rolled upon the scaffold. The "Reign of Terror" was over. This brought deliverance to thousands in prisons, and to Oberlin, who beyond question was on his way to one.

Meanwhile during this period Oberlin was deprived of his usual income, which was meager enough at the best. His parishioners made the utmost exertions to meet the emergency, agreeing when the Revolution began to make an annual collection of fourteen hundred francs ($280). The first year they raised less than eleven hundred and fifty ($230), and during the remaining time of common distress this was reduced to less than four hundred francs ($80),

which was his entire yearly revenue, excepting his humble personal earnings. The almost total failure of the annual supplies left him and his household largely dependent upon their own labor for the actual necessities of life, and may account for a most serious illness which brought him to death's door, said to have been "brought on by over-exertion." His greatest trial was his inability to aid others in these hard times, as formerly, and during the delirium of his sickness he was perpetually asking his attendant for funds to help him in benevolent plans. From this illness his constitution never quite recovered its extraordinary vigor.

After Robespierre's overthrow Oberlin immediately announced his purpose to receive twelve pupils to instruct within his home. He had no difficulty in securing these, as the girls who had been sent to his mountain schools from distant parts had been in great repute as teachers, and Oberlin's testimonials were readily accepted as surety for sound instruction and gentle manners. As soon as it was known that he would take pupils for personal instruction, the children of several foreigners of distinction were committed to him, and he was once more in the receipt of a regular income. It was a happy day for him when he

was again able to resume his pastorate and gather his villagers to their churches for the open and unhindered worship of God.

When he gathered his scattered flock together, he declared to them that henceforth he would serve them without any fixed salary. Every one knew the way to the parsonage and might bring his share to whatever amount he pleased and at whatever time, and if any should bring nothing he would not feel hurt; he would consider that it was only the inability to contribute. They had had a hard time together, and he would not add to their burdens. He desired that they should contribute in the same manner what they could afford for the payment of the schoolmasters, and likewise for charitable purposes. It might be " in the form of goods, provisions, or money."

Though he suffered at times for daring thus to interpret literally the Scripture, " Take no thought for the morrow," as to his personal wants, he was enabled to live in his extremely frugal way. A sack of flour would be found at his door, no one having been seen to bring it. Butter, eggs, and fruit would appear when it was known that he was to entertain strangers. At one time, for example, when he " was called upon to pay an important bill the next day and

his purse was entirely empty," he writes: "I went for my usual walk towards the little forest and said in my heart: 'My God, thou knowest my trouble and all my needs. Thou wilt not let me remain incapable of fulfilling my engagements!' While returning to the village I met a woman who was standing aside. She timidly approached me: 'Oh, my dear pastor, can you forgive me? Several years ago when I was in great trouble you lent me a sum of money which I was not able to return when it was due. Here it is at last. Forgive my long delay.'"

Oberlin now felt that the most trying times were over and looked forward to better days. For the republic he had high hopes. He did not see, and others did not, that the first day of Bonaparte meant the last day of the republic. This patriot pastor looked for a new country and new institutions in place of a single man; the development of new sentiments, new manners, and new life with free institutions. The stringent military despotism which followed for fourteen years did not, however, affect the local work of Oberlin. While the great general was campaigning over the continent, triumphing over the proudest monarchies of Europe, dethroning kings and enthroning members of his family, the

Protestant churches were unmolested, and the pastor of the hills was left to work out once more his quiet but far-reaching mission in peace.

Little by little his illustration of the "cleaning up" was justified, and the political changes on the whole proved to be for the betterment of the people. Nevertheless, in the disappointment of his political expectations he felt more deeply than ever that revolutions can effect but little good unless the individuals who make up the nation themselves become good. He said: "People babble about liberty who are in the worst slavery to their passions and selfish desires. The most untakable Bastile is that which towers in our hearts."

IX

SUCCEEDING YEARS

IX

SUCCEEDING YEARS

(1795–1826)

FROM 1789 to 1795 the experiences of Oberlin had not only marked him as a bold leader, but had as well brought his name and work among the mountain peasantry into more extended recognition. Attention was particularly directed to him from the fact that he had remained in his harassed district, standing by his parishes when others far less exposed to danger had fled over the borders into Germany; that he had continued his unique leadership and practically much of his preaching when church services were interdicted; that he had twice braved the political courts which had tried him, and that finally he had been arrested for a third trial. This wider knowledge of his qualities led to renewed overtures for him to leave his laborious cares in the hills and take charge of a church where cultured life would bring with

it superior advantages, greater recognized honor, and a satisfactory salary. His answer was the same to all: "No, I will never leave this place. It took me ten years to learn every head in this parish, making an inventory of the moral, intellectual, and domestic wants of each.[1] I have laid my plans for the future. I must have at least ten years to carry these into execution, and I shall need the ten following to correct their faults and vices. God has confided this flock to me. Why should I abandon it?" Thus, at the age of fifty-six, with his powers matured and in full strength, Oberlin renewed his devotion, laboring with the same earnest spirit, in the same forms, personally attending to the daily details in the material and religious interests of the villages.

His prophetic genius was not exhausted in anticipating many of the modern theories of both primary and secondary education and their methods, the combination of manual and industrial instruction, the scientific study of agricul-

[1] The book of records may still be seen in the parish house in Waldersbach. In it Pastor Oberlin kept an exact and careful statement of the ancestry, hereditary tendencies, characteristics, and deeds of every member of the five villages under his pastoral care. No necessary detail was insignificant to him. The interests which belonged to the whole, belonged to every part.

ture with lectures and practical experiments, but as if it were by intuition he enunciated the principles which enter into the sociological questions of to-day.

The churches of his time, narrow in their ideas, were consequently restricted in their sympathies and in their schemes for the salvation of man, and were chiefly treating men individually as souls that needed to be saved and safeguarded; there was little apprehension of the obligations and relationships of people collectively.

Oberlin realized, as no other teachers appear to have done in that day, that we must deal with environment as well as with heredity, and that it is well-nigh impossible to save individuals if we neglect them in their community conditions. He saw as clearly then as we do now that there is more in the interdependent relations of organized society than the units which compose it; that missionary work cannot regard man as an individual only, but must have a care for him also in his relations to other men, to human life in its social conditions; and that in dealing with these facts we must reckon not only with the influences of hereditary tendencies and with the history of the past into the consequences of which

people have entered but also with the environments and capabilities of the present; with all and with everything that enters into character and goes to determine character and conduct. Oberlin was a full century in advance of his day in this realization of the fact that souls are people in their relations to each other and to the whole body of which they are members, and that the gospel can mean relatively but little to a people who by the state of things about them are merely existing; that the human soul cannot be adequately considered apart from its food, its home, its work, and its wages. The practical social problems which interest the present generation were not only in Oberlin's mind, but in his limited sphere he worked them out, applying the ethics of Christianity as we now understand them. He was teaching social regeneration when he was teaching the people how to live and how all people everywhere ought to live. In this instruction also he made his own home a practical social settlement, free to all and always open for illustration and example. One of the rules of his "Village Improvement Society," another sociological prophecy, was that "no lad should be received for confirmation without a certificate from his parents that he had planted and cared

for two fruit trees in a suitable and designated place."

Oberlin's alertness in welcoming whatever contributed to the public good is evinced in the fact that in the very year of the formation of the British and Foreign Bible Society, in 1804, he became its first correspondent and one of its most earnest coadjutors. As soon as he heard of its incorporation he immediately organized a little "Auxiliary Bible Society" in his own home, and the parsonage at Waldbach became the principal center of the distribution of the Scriptures throughout France. Through his son, Henry, who had much of the genius and devotion of his father, Oberlin, from this little mountain depot, undertook the work of Bible distribution in various provinces of the nation.

The fourteenth report of the British and Foreign Bible Society thus refers to this son, his work, and his untimely death: "Your committee think it due to the late Rev. Henry Oberlin of Waldbach, in Alsatia, to bear testimony to the zeal by which he was urged to sacrifice his valuable life in exertions for distributing the Holy Scriptures among his countrymen. The immediate occasion of the death of this young man was a cold which he caught in 1815, while as-

sisting to extinguish a fire which had broken out in a town in his route, as he was making his circuit through the south of France to ascertain the condition of the Protestants and the means of supplying them with the Holy Scriptures."

Through the prominence into which Oberlin and his work in Alsatia were brought by the exciting events of the Revolution, he had been nominated before the fall of Napoleon to receive the medal of the "Legion of Honor." Later this distinction was conferred upon him by the royal ordinance of Louis XVIII "for services which he has rendered in his pastorate during fifty-three years, employing constant efforts for the amelioration of the people, for zeal in the establishment of schools and their methods of instruction, and the many branches of industry and advancement in agriculture and the improvement of roads, which have made that district flourishing and happy."

To those who complimented him on the reception of this honor he modestly replied: "The king has the kindness to send me the decoration of the 'Legion of Honor.' But what have I done to deserve it? Who in my situation would not have done what I have, and perhaps better?"

In 1818 a report read by Count de Neuf-

chateau before the National Agricultural Society of Paris, setting forth at length the improvements in agriculture introduced by Oberlin, concluded in these words: "I am happy in being able to manifest before you the attachment and interest I have for the department of the Vosges, in giving you so excellent an opportunity to crown in the person of Mr. Oberlin not merely a special act, but an entire life consecrated to the dissemination, in a district before his arrival there almost savage, of the best methods of agriculture and the purest lights of civilization. We shall record it in the Memoirs of the Society as an admirable example of what the influence of an enlightened man can effect for the welfare of an entire region. What an instructive and interesting history is that of the prodigies accomplished in silence in this almost unknown corner of the Vosges! How delightful it is for us to know that France possesses in its bosom such a miracle of virtue! How consoling it is to think that this is not a dream of philanthropy, but that these are positive facts, and that imagination can add nothing to reality!" As a token of its appreciation a gold medal was decreed to him and conveyed with every mark of honor.

The emperor, Alexander of Russia, added his highest appreciation of Oberlin's character. An officer in the imperial service who had been one of Oberlin's pupils in Strasburg, on asking leave of absence to visit his old tutor at Waldbach, received from the czar this gracious message: "Pastor Oberlin is not unknown to me. I know him to be a true minister of the Lord. Tell him I love him and revere him." The officer delivered this message, and on taking leave of his old tutor, Oberlin kissed his hand, saying, "Give that to the emperor, and assure him of my respect and of my desire that the divine will may be fulfilled in him."

The officer reporting this to the emperor said, "Sire, I have a sacred duty to fulfil in offering you the homage of Pastor Oberlin," and attempted to kiss his Majesty's hand. The emperor drew it back, saying, "You know I allow no one to kiss my hand, least of all a preacher of the gospel!" The officer replied, "But I cannot retain on my hand the impress of the lips of Father Oberlin sent to your Majesty;" whereupon the emperor embraced the bearer of the message and said, "That is for Father Oberlin." This occurred at Riga in 1819.

These late honors — for Oberlin was now

eighty years of age — could not have been other than pleasing to him, but certainly it would have overwhelmed him to know that after a century and more had intervened his name would be perpetuated anew in one of its most beautiful modern avenues in his native city — the city of Goethe and of Gutenberg — as one of its most notable sons, while the then popular ministers of the rich churches of his day are forgotten.

We have seen that Oberlin had faith in dreams, but the strangest one which could come to him would have been that his name would wing its way from the remote mountain tops across the continent of Europe, span the wide sea into the new world which he had once hoped to enter, and inscribe itself upon one of the most potential of America's institutions of higher learning, so many of whose sons, in sympathy with his ideas of brotherhood, its obligations and its needs, seem to have caught his spirit of noble service, and thus to give the college which bears his name its special distinction.

It seemed to those who sought to secure the services of Oberlin in a larger sphere that he should have listened to some of their attractive calls when they came to him in the prime

of his power and attainments. Though he could not realize what far-away results might flow from his fidelity to the trust he had in hand upon the isolated hills, he did not feel that his influence would be greater if he were preaching in a more conspicuous pulpit and to a people less dependent upon his personal power. He was not one of those who are ever looking for better occasions or larger opportunities. What Oberlin did emphasize was supreme fidelity to the trusts he had. He was sure he had been called of God to minister where he was. He was not sure that the call to leave was of the same voice. Until he had this assurance he would be as immovable as the hills about him. In this his conscience was right and his judgment was wise. His fidelity is saying to many a self-denying minister to-day that wisdom will not judge the magnitude of a work by outward appearance. No one can tell where or how far his influence may go, though his work be ever so lowly.

The time came at last when age asserted itself, and, when no longer able to minister to his scattered parishes, his son-in-law came to Waldbach as his assistant; but the resolute man had no thought of yielding to old age except

upon compulsion. He would say to his young people about him: "Don't grow old. Don't do it! You see what has become of the active Fritz. Why, he can hardly drag himself along! Don't grow old" — and he would add — "but do not think, my dears, that I murmur at this. Oh! the good God is wiser than old Fritz."

He never lost his sympathy with youth, but retained his cheerfulness, his hilarity, his merry smile and upright figure as long as he lived. "Even to his last days," says his daughter, Madame Rauscher, "he could show young men how soldiers march: 'Form in line. Left foot first. March! Right about,' and so on, drilling them with evident pleasure." When after fourscore years of age it became impossible for him to visit the people of his parishes, he kept his printing-press busy with his circulars and messages, setting up the type and working the press with his own hands. Often when inclined to rest, his daughter would overhear him chiding himself for his unwelcome fatigue: "Ah! Fritz, idling are you? What does this mean?" upon which he would rouse himself for the work which was engaging him. He kept the parish register before him daily, and, as he would read the

names one by one, would pray for them as if they were indeed his children. The time came at last for which this highly gifted and devoted servant of God had waited in earnest expectation of his more complete heirship with the Master who had won his youthful heart and who had been his strength and joy through all the years. On the first day of June, 1826, when the hills were waking into the glory of the season, the soul of Oberlin passed into the new and larger life. The tolling of the church bell at Waldbach announced to the stricken people of his parishes that they had lost the presence and service of their greatest earthly friend.

At his funeral people gathered from far to testify to their love and their sense of loss. Magistrates and ministers from neighboring communities and several Catholic priests in full canonicals were mourning at his grave. A final farewell which Oberlin himself had written was read: "Thou, O ever dear Parish, God will not forget you, nor abandon you. He has thoughts of peace and mercy for you. Oh! that you might forget my name to remember only that of Jesus Christ whom I have preached. He it is who is your pastor. Good-bye, dear friends, I have loved you much. 'O my God, may thine eye

ever watch over my dear parishioners, thine ear be ever open to hear them, and thy hand be ever stretched out to protect them. I commend them to thee, and put them in thy arms. Send them pastors after thine own heart and never leave them.' "

X

PERSONALITY AND CHARACTERISTICS

X

PERSONALITY AND CHARACTERISTICS

THE attainments which Oberlin laid in his generous course of university studies proved to be a constant investment for usefulness in his pastorate. He retained to old age his scholarly tastes and habits. In a certain degree of the term, Oberlin was a scholar. The diversity of his knowledge, however, is to be remarked, rather than any special mastership in particular lines. Intellectual, loving the natural sciences, history, and literature, he devoted every hour to study which was not demanded by parish duties or absorbed by his family. Much of his attention was given to the physical sciences and their application and uses. He was fond of mathematics. He had no special inclination to metaphysics, but he kept himself in his reading alert to the philosophies of his day.

As a preacher in the examination of his texts, he invariably went to the original tongues, which

were his best commentaries. When some one inquired of him as to his intellectual preferences, with his characteristic modesty he replied, "Je sais un peu de tout, et en tout rien," or as he once wrote it in Latin, "In omnibus aliquid, et in toto nihil." Certainly a life like his forbade scholarship.

His writings, mostly local and ephemeral, were such as would naturally be struck off in a ministry like his. While his sermons were for the most part written, they were adapted to the limited education and conditions of his peasant people. At the same time they show no lack of respect for the ability on their part to receive vigorous thought. Many of the sermons have marks of the originality which was indicated in many ways in his methods of developing the people of the district. In his preaching he studied colloquial plainness, interspersing his teachings with illustrations from every-day life, which might seem too familiar had they been addressed to a more cultivated audience. In general he committed the full text of the discourse scrupulously to memory.

He was wont to say that he was "deficient in memory," but certainly he was not lacking in that mentality which is the foundation of all

intellectual operations. He was not one of those whose acquisitive powers through a mechanical memory are remarkable but who never know what to do with what has been acquired. Thinking out his conclusions in his own way, he did not burden himself with the forms of others.

The dominant tone of his discourses was persuasive and tender. This is especially to be noted, as he was living in the days when "the terrors of the Lord" were common in religious discourse. When, for example, Jonathan Edwards in this country was preaching his terrific sermon upon the "sinner in the hands of an angry God," Oberlin, who was no philosopher like Edwards, showed his prophetic nature in anticipating the thought and feeling of Christians a hundred years later in the emphasis which he placed on God's own definition of himself. As the love of God was the inspiration of his life, so it was the central thought in his preaching, and he does not appear to have changed the theological sentiments of his earlier years in this respect in his later experience.

At the death of his father, after Oberlin had been three years a pastor, his old professor, Lorenz, said to him: "My dear Oberlin, your father's death must pain you greatly — all the

more, although he was a perfectly honest man — since there is no hope that the gates of heaven will open for him; for he was not among those who had been regenerated."

Oberlin at once replied with much warmth, "Mr. Professor, I feel very easy as to that, for I am as sure that my excellent father is in heaven as I am that God has promised to all who believe in him that he would hear their prayer." Stuber, with whom Madame Rauscher, Oberlin's daughter, collaborated in writing his biography, adds, "The dogma of eternal pain could never have been received by the loving soul of Oberlin." When this doctrine was once proposed in his presence, as related by an intimate friend, he rejected it emphatically, saying, "If God would eternally damn one of his creatures, he would cease to be God. He would become a devil." ("Si Dieu pouvait damner éternellement une de ses créatures, il cesserait d'être Dieu; il devienderait diable.") It should be noted, however, that we have no writing of Oberlin's to confirm this.

At the same time his discourses show that no loose views were entertained by him as to the nature and certainty of retribution. Numerous passages in them speak of the inevitable penal-

ties of sin and the fearful retributions in a future life for those who remain unreconciled to God. He knew that the fruitage of sin is not the same as that of righteousness. He thoroughly believed "in the judgment to come."

Akin to his sense of the love and grace of God was his remarkable catholicity. Stuber calls it "tolerance," but Oberlin had gone quite beyond tolerating those whose opinions he could not accept. Ardent in defending his own convictions and in presenting them to others, he was great enough to hold fraternal relations with those whose faith was not expressed in his terms and whose education had led them to different views.

It was natural at that period for Roman Catholics and Protestants to maintain their differences with much hostility. Their conflicts were recent; their enmities were not concealed. Here again the prophet anticipated "a more excellent way." An illustration of this was when a young woman of Schirmeck, a neighboring village, who was a Roman Catholic, had married a Protestant of his own parish. This relationship was exceptional and aroused the animosity of the young husband's relatives, especially because by marriage agreement the children were to be brought up in the

religion of the mother. The time came when a little daughter was to be baptized by the Roman Catholic priest of Schirmeck. The parents were to take the road over the mountain for this purpose, but the enemies of the young husband determined to prevent this baptism and made plans to waylay the couple at a particular point in the road, where by intimidation and violence, if necessary, they would compel them to return. The young parents heard of this as they were starting out, and in their trouble went to Oberlin for counsel. He immediately offered to accompany them for protection. On arriving at the spot in the forest where the parties had arranged an ambuscade, Oberlin knelt down, and extending his hands over the young people exclaimed: "Great God, thou who seest wickedness lying in wait and plotting mischief; thou seest innocence in alarm. Avert the danger, or give thy children strength to meet it." At this moment several men who had concealed themselves in a thicket rushed forward with threatening shouts, but Oberlin, taking the infant in his arms, advanced with coolness which did not conceal his indignation, saying, "Here is the infant which has done you so much injury, which disturbs the peace of your days," and with this little text of

a baby in his arms he showed them the wickedness of their design in such a way that they realized it for themselves, and begged pardon both of their pastor and the young man. In the forest Oberlin led them to a reconciliation, sent the married couple to the priest at Schirmeck, and returned with the men who had been surprised by him to the village. When they reached it he said, "My children, remember this day on the mountain if you wish that I should forget it."

To a Roman Catholic who expressed his regret that they were not of the same religion, his reply was: "If you are a Christian, my dear friend, we are of the same religion. Let us follow the law given by the Saviour; it is the only true law; the forms and ceremonies added by different sects are of little importance."

The Catholic prefect of Strasburg was one of his intimate friends. Stoeber says: "They would converse on sacred subjects far into the night, and often the good prefect left Oberlin's study with tears in his eyes, so powerfully had the conference affected him." A Catholic gentleman, M. Merlin, asked Oberlin if he believed that heathen who lived in charity were saved. "I have no doubt of it." "You do not believe, then, that Socrates, for example, is doomed to eternal

misery?" "What!" exclaimed Oberlin with warmth, "that good man! No. I believe he has a seat very near the throne of God." Meeting, one day, a Catholic citizen who told him that he had heard of his preaching against the Catholic religion, Oberlin opened his Bible, and turning to the epistles of Peter, James, and John, said, "You see these Catholic Epistles are read by all our people; how can I preach against a religion that is Catholic?"

Surrounded by a mixed population of Catholics and Protestants, he felt that if he bore the name of "Evangelical Catholic" it would represent the fact, and was less likely to prevent his influence than to be designated by the narrower name of "Protestant." "Our faith is not in Luther, but in Jesus Christ."

A portrait of Luther hung in his study. To a visitor whose attention was drawn to it he said: "Luther was not the founder of a new religion; he only brought us back to the religion of Jesus Christ. God will regard all who adhere to the doctrines of his divine Son, be they Catholics or Lutherans."

A document was found among his papers containing a full statement of the "circumstances which determined me to call myself Evangelical

Catholic minister, rather than a minister of the Protestant religion," in which he says: " A young Catholic priest has told some one that if the other ministers called Protestants were as truly Catholic as the minister of Waldbach, he would not hesitate to place himself on their side. Thus the hatred and repugnance that so long caused us sorrows of every kind have little by little given place to brotherly love, and our doctrines are seen to be those of the true Catholic Church; that is to say, Christian!" As a fact, Oberlin did succeed in reducing the antipathy between Protestants and Catholics throughout his district, and came to be venerated by both priests and people.

He administered the sacraments to Catholics, Lutherans, and Calvinists at the same time, and because they would not eat the same bread, he had on a plate bread of different kinds, — wafers, leavened and unleavened.

It was a little meeting-house where this occurred, but it was large enough to welcome John Calvin, John Wesley, Luther, and Fénelon to the communion table had they appeared, and to place them in the same fellowship which they doubtless now enjoy.

Nevertheless, he faithfully defended his own position: " As to the terms Schismatics and Here-

tics, judge ye for yourselves which merits reproach, — we who practise what is contained in the Catholic Epistles and the Gospels, or those who will not allow these Scriptures in the hands of their parishioners."

The conversation between an English traveler who visited Waldbach and the driver of his carriage is given in an English memoir:

"You go to see our good pastor, Oberlin?" said the driver.

"Yes. Do you know him?"

"Oh, yes, I know him very well. I often go to hear him preach."

"But you are a Catholic, are you not?"

"Yes, we are all Catholics at Schirmeck, but that does not prevent us from going to hear the good pastor at Waldbach."

"Do you like his preaching?"

"Indeed I do! He often brings tears to our eyes. He is a man who tries to serve us in all possible ways."

"Tell me what he has done."

"Done! Everything that could be done. There are so many things! Let me see; first, he made this road for us."

"That is not much to boast of."

"That may be, but look you, sir, not many years ago we could not pass here even with a little carriage like this. The pastor planned all this road and worked

on it himself to encourage others, and that little bridge we are coming to, he made that also."

"He must be rich to do so many things!"

"You may say he is rich, but he is not rich."

"How so?"

"If he kept all he gives away he would be rich, but he keeps nothing for himself; he gives away everything. You will see his house. You will not find it a palace."

Another incident is characteristic of his broad sympathies. One day while working in his study he heard a great noise in the village.

Looking out where the tumult was, he saw a stranger, who proved to be a Jewish pedler whom almost the whole population was loading with threats and abuse. Oberlin made his way at once through the mob while every one was crying, "A Jew! A Jew!"

Putting himself beside the persecuted man and making himself heard, he reproached the people as not worthy of the name of Christians who could persecute a poor man for not being one; then, placing the package of goods upon his own shoulders and taking the man by the hand, he led him into the parsonage away from their insults and made him his guest.

No one could abhor the teachings of Rousseau

or Voltaire with more intensity than Oberlin, but on a certain occasion, when he had been speaking vehemently of them, his friend Stoeber ventured to say that Rousseau had denounced certain sins against the family on the part of French women and that Voltaire had defended victims of oppression and cruelty. Oberlin's expression changed instantly, and his comment was, "Ah! les chers!" He did not think any better of their doctrines, but he could appreciate whatever was good in their conduct.

His tendency to abstract and speculative researches found a fine balance in an uncommon, practical cast of mind. While his thoughts perpetually traveled towards the unseen and sought to get beyond the barriers which separate the other world from this one, he never slackened his hold of the details of daily interest or duty. While he persuaded himself of the certainty of continued influence on the part of the spirits of the departed upon their loved ones on earth, his mind lost no attentiveness to the passing events of his little hamlets, nor yet to those of the wider world. He used frequently to speak of the conscious and uninterrupted affection of his deceased wife toward him, and was sure that in his dreams and visions of the night she advised him, en-

couraged him in his work, and gave him most positive assurance of the interest of the other world in this one.

When asked how he could distinguish these visions and tidings from ordinary dreams, his reply was, "How do you distinguish one color from another?" His manuscript books abound in details of these dreams which he interpreted. Naturally his mind inclined to clairvoyance, and he took great pleasure in the phenomena of what was then called "animal magnetism." He became a great friend of his contemporary, the Swiss mystic, Lavater, was in frequent and familiar correspondence with him, and sympathized with many of his eccentric views of physiognomy as a science.

He thought that he could judge the character from the features, and even from the mere outline, from the profile silhouettes, which were then common. He made in this study a large collection of profiles and taught the children in their drawing classes to make them. He also believed that he could detect qualities good or bad from the preference in colors.

We are not surprised to find that his interest in the reality of the communion which he himself had with his departed wife led him to the

study of Swedenborg's works, which had been recommended to him by his friend, the German mystic and author, Dr. Jung Stilling, an intimate friend also of Goethe. He certainly found much of suggestiveness in the analogies of Swedenborg and in the correspondences between natural and spiritual things. A chart or celestial diagram of Solomon's Temple as representing the kingdom of heaven is still to be seen in the Waldbach parsonage, in which he endeavored to make clear the fact that the future life would depend upon the character formed in the life of the body, the innermost mansions of the temple being of those who had been most devoted to the service of others. His biographer, Stoeber, remarks upon Oberlin's belief in the influence of spirits on earthly life, saying: "We are far from wishing to favor superstition, but to say a thing is not because we ourselves have not known it; to deny what another has seen himself because we ourselves have not seen it; to deny what another has seen and felt because we have not seen or felt as he has — this does not seem sound reasoning." However we may regard these fancies, if we choose to call them such, of this uncommon man, in everything that had to do with earthly life there was no lack of sound, hard, practical

common sense. His heavenly visions in no way injured his earthly eyesight. His eccentricities, if they are so judged, were all on the side of righteousness; and for the comfort of those who may think that his spirit of liberality was carried to a great length, it may be said that his discourses give no hint of eccentricities and show him to have been as evangelical as the New Testament. His standing as a Lutheran pastor was never questioned.

By the side of this characteristic, loving quality was his keen sense of justice, which is particularly marked by his course in the treatment of the French assignats. The heavy expenses of the revolutionary government had been met by the issue of a small paper currency called assignats, which from the vast amount and doubtful security came to be passed for much less than their nominal value. Oberlin felt that the nation was dishonest in not keeping its promises, and that the scaling down of the notes was, in so far, a personal repudiation. He prepared a circular in opposition to this depreciation, saying: "These notes are obligations of the nation to which it has pledged its faith; to receive them at less than their face value is to assail the good faith of the nation, and true patriots will not allow

themselves to be accomplices in this depreciation." He proved his consistency by receiving, in his parishes, the notes to their full value, and recommended that every one who held one of them should submit to a discount of two per cent and indorse this on paper in each transaction, so that in time the note would be canceled and the debt discharged. Among his own papers was found one of these notes indorsed in his handwriting, "Thus, thanks to God, my country is honestly released from this obligation." He bought up all the assignats which had been brought into the Ban-de-la-Roche and made the depreciation good. A comment has been made upon this which styles it "a freak of conscience and a curious exhibition of patriotism," but the protest against dishonor in behalf of individual responsibility of the citizens was not lost. This sense of patriotic justice, however quixotic it seemed to many, was recognized in the minutes of the national convention of France in its "Sixteenth Fructidor" and placed upon its records. During twenty years he succeeded in canceling no less a sum than 78,625 francs, and this in one of the poorest districts of the nation.

This sensitive ethical sense revealed itself also in his testimony against human slavery. He

would not use sugar in his household, " for every granule of it is tainted with the blood of the unhappy slave." He would not use coffee; no article wrung out of involuntary servitude would he touch. The substitute was roasted barley, which was sweetened with honey. This protest against a public iniquity has likewise been criticized as a useless exhibition of a mistaken conscience, in that whatever one man might do on the mountains an ocean and a half continent away from slavery could not affect the question either way. It was not, however, useless testimony. At a time when devoted ministers of the gospel in our own land were diligently establishing the divine foundations of the institution of slavery by the Scriptures, he was manufacturing moral ozone for the convictions of a people not yet born, which got wafted across the sea in due season without losing its strength.

We do not know how he applied his ethics so that the same ostracism, with a refreshing inconsistency, failed to include tobacco. The snuff-box, which was a great comfort to him, had a special dispensation. When, however, his regard for it became overmasterful, the good man rebelled, with a harangue which it is to be feared had frequent repetition: " Ah, you wish to com-

mand me, to make me a slave! I will show you which of us is master and which is to obey. Go to prison, my lady," upon which he locked up and banished to a different floor his too-assertive friend, thus making necessary a special trip with much inconvenience when the desire became urgent.

One of the happiest days of his life was when he had succeeded in putting an end to a litigation carried on between the inhabitants of Ban-de-la-Roche and the former lords of the district with regard to the right of the forest which covered a great part of the mountains. The contest began before the French Revolution and had survived it. Oberlin took every opportunity to induce the people to consent to an amicable arrangement, even at the expense of a voluntary sacrifice on their part of some of their rights, rather than prolong a lawsuit which would be ruinous even should they finally get the case. During many years he had a motto affixed to one of the doors, "O God, have mercy on Steinthal and put an end to the lawsuit."

Sermon followed sermon on the "Duty of Peace" with the purpose to secure the consent of the people to a compromise, no easy matter to effect with either party. An agreement was

at last brought about which closed the disputes of more than three-quarters of a century. The prefect of the lower Rhine was so gratified at the result that he suggested to the mayors in deputation when the deed was signed, "The pen used should be presented to the pastor, to be suspended in his study as a trophy of a victory which he had gained over animosities and bad passions."

Oberlin's conscience went into the minutest details of life. Excessively scrupulous as to the employment of time, he held himself to strictest punctuality in every engagement. He felt it to be an almost unpardonable transgression for one to demand that he should use his time profitlessly, and he carried this so far as to condemn careless handwriting. "What right has a correspondent to use my time by compelling me to study out what should be plain?" He considered that if it was a lack of respect for one to present himself to another in a negligent or shiftless form, much more should the clothing of one's mind be seemly in appearance. What he required of others he required of himself.

Not a blot is to be found on his many manuscripts; every word is distinct, clear, neat, and legible. Each noun was written with a capi-

tal letter, and each word without abbreviation had its full value. If this extreme care is to be counted among his eccentricities, it was like most other marks of his peculiar personality — one which it might be useful for many of us to imitate.

In his old age, as his name had become more widely known, the natural curiosity of those who were interested in him and in his work found expression in their letters to him. To one who in 1820 asked for his profile and for something about himself, he cut one and wrote the following description of his character:

I am a strange compound of contradictory qualities. I do not exactly know what I am to make of myself. I am intelligent, and yet I am possessed of very limited powers. I am more given to tact and prudence than most of my colleagues, and yet I am very apt to blunder. I am firm and decided, but I can yield to others without trouble. I think myself daring and actually courageous in necessity, but at the same time I am perhaps secretly a coward. I am very frank, but also complaisant to men, therefore not absolutely sincere. I am both French and German, disposed to be noble, generous, obliging, faithful, grateful, and affected by the least evidence of kindness, yet I am indifferent and careless.

I am also extremely irritable. They who are kind

to me have much influence with me, but contradiction makes me stubborn, especially in matters of conscience. I have a vivid imagination but little memory, properly speaking. The histories that I have taken pains to impress on my mind remain with me, but dates and names of persons I often forget the next day. I am so sensitive that often I cannot express the feelings which oppress me and pain me. I am always busy and industrious; I also like indolence. I am generally quick in resolving and equally so in executing. I admire music, painting, and poetry, but have no gifts in these arts. Mechanics and natural history are my favorite studies. I am a devotee of regularity. I am a soldier by instinct, but was more so in feeling before my physical strength was weakened. I have always striven to be first in danger and to be firm in pain. The military discipline pleases me because it forces the coward to show courage and the disorderly man to be punctual.

I love humor and have a sarcastic turn of mind, but without intentional ill feeling. Since my childhood I have aspired to a life higher than that of the world."

In another paper, writing of his joy in restoring one who in asphyxia was supposed to be dead, he said: "I had need to use all my authority to get myself obeyed. I pretended anger, I stamped my foot, I shouted like a sailor, I scolded those who stood weeping, I threatened to beat everybody if they did not keep quiet and help me."

If the first person singular seems somewhat glorified in these quotations, it may be said that in this instance it was not the self-eulogy of a man who could be accused of conceit; it was rather where a man above eighty years of age, in a confiding and ingenuous mood, looked at himself and thought aloud what, if he had been an egoist, he would not have said. Doubtless every parishioner would have demurred at almost every expression of his demerits, and it is safe to say that there was not one who knew him who did not think more highly of the pastor than he did himself.

During the time of the "Terror," Augustin Périer, brother of the prime minister, Casimir Périer, in his capacity of deputy, visited Ban-de-la-Roche. In his diary he mentions Oberlin: "I have never yet found a man with a more frank, amiable, and friendly manner; his conversation is easy, with much color and illustration, but always suited to the person to whom he speaks."

An English writer who met him after he was eighty years of age described him: "Oberlin is a handsome man of medium height and remarkably dignified appearance. He wears a black hat and a long frock-coat adorned with the ribbon of 'The Legion of Honor.' His manner is grave

but extremely affectionate and gentlemanly. His courtesy toward his parishioners is constantly manifested; he never passes in front of them without taking off his hat and saying a few affectionate words. When he meets children, he takes them by the hand and shows his good-will by little thoughtful attentions."

Still another visitor adds: "Oberlin's personal manners were admirable. Kind and familiar with all his villagers, he preserved a dignity which commanded respect, universal and filial. He was careful to set an example which should not be liable to misconstruction or appear to be opposed to his precepts. In this, as in every other matter, he was to the last degree scrupulous. On one occasion, as together we were walking up a hill, he had the arm of his son-in-law, whilst my wife was walking by herself unattended. Fearing that this might be considered self-indulgent or disrespectful by some of his younger parishioners whom he happened to pass (though he was then in his eightieth year), he stopped to make apology for his apparent disregard of the law of civility. I happened one day, when we were driven by a man who seemed to go in a hazardous manner, to say, 'Take care!' The pastor appeared hurt at this admonition, both on my

account and that of the driver. He assured me that all was safe, and at the end of the drive took the greatest pains to prevent any feeling which might arise in the mind of his parishioner."

Madame de Berckheim, who knew him when not so advanced in years, left her record as she saw him: " A handsome figure; his bearing erect; his eyes have an expression of marvelous insight. In his conversation he shows a lively imagination. He has the gift of repartee, the sudden brilliant flashes of his mind which charm his entourage. His speech is marked by an extraordinary persuasiveness in intonation and choice of expression. His way of saying things is unique. The nobility of his soul shines in the spirituality of his countenance."

A letter written by an English lady who visited his home in 1820, spending some days at the parsonage, gives us an animated description of the venerable pastor and his family:

. . . a perfect picture of what an old man and a minister should be. He received us cordially, and we soon felt quite at ease with him. I never knew so well what the grace of courtesy was till I saw this remarkable man. He treats the poorest people, and even the little children, with affectionate respect. For instance, his kindness and hospitality to our postilion were quite amus-

ing. He pulled his hat off when he met him, took him by the hand and treated him with really tender consideration. He is, I think, more than eighty, one of the handsomest old men I ever remember to have seen, still vigorous in mind and spirit, delighting in his parish, full of fervent charity. He shakes hands with the children when he meets them in the streets. The effect which such treatment has had in polishing these people, uncivilized as they formerly were, is quite wonderful. The state of the schools, the children and the poor in general, as much exceeds our parish as ours does the most neglected. The meals in his home are really amusing: We all sit down to the same table, maids and all. At our supper was one great dish of pottage, or boiled spinach; a quantity of salad and potatoes, on which they chiefly live, being placed in the middle. The luxury of a common English cottage is not known in Ban-de-la-Roche. We breakfast at seven — the family upon potatoes boiled with milk and water; a little coffee is provided for us. Everything is in the most primitive style. The poor charm me. I have never met with any like them; so much humility, spirituality, and with manners that would do honor to a court.

The letter continues:

COLMAR, *Friday Evening.*

Our scene is again quite changed; we have returned to the common world; and now I find myself over a comfortable fire at a good hotel which is quite a

luxury after the primitive fare of the Ban-de-la-Roche, where we found but little indulgence for the body, though we were treated with genuine hospitality.

It was indeed plain living and high thinking, but these simple forms of life made the man's achievements possible.

Perhaps nothing that pertains to the characteristics of Oberlin is more illuminating than his methods of benevolence. Engrossed as he was in his plans for his own villagers, no sooner had he heard that missionaries had gone to the heathen in foreign lands, than he gave all the silver in his house except one silver spoon, which afterwards went in the same way.

To some one who desired to know how he could be so poor and yet contribute, not only to the necessities of his own fields, but also take in the missionary work of foreign lands, he said:

You ask me for some explanation. I will tell you how I manage: I devote three tithes of all I earn, all that I receive, and all my revenue of whatever name or nature it may be, to the service of God. For this purpose I keep three boxes; the first for the first tithe, the second for the second, and the third box for the third. When I cannot pay ready money all at once, I mark how much I owe upon a bit of paper which I put into the box; and when, on the contrary,

a demand occurs which ought to be defrayed by one of the three allotments, and there is not sufficient money deposited, I advance the sum and make the box my debtor by marking how much it owes me. By this means I am always able to assist in any public or charitable undertaking, and as God has himself declared that "it is more blessed to give than to receive," I look upon this regular disbursement rather in the light of a privilege than a burden.

The first of the above-mentioned boxes contains a deposit for the worship of God. I devote the contents of this box to the building and repairing of churches and schoolrooms, the support of the teachers for the infant schools, and the purchases of Bibles; in short, to anything connected with divine worship or the extension of our Redeemer's kingdom.

My parishioners are at liberty to recall from this tithe any present that either generosity or the supposition that I expected it may have induced them to make me.

The second box contains tithes for useful purposes. I employ this for a variety of purposes — for the improvement of roads to the churches and schools, for the schoolmasters' salaries, for all works of public utility, for expenses incurred among the peasantry of the villages.

The third box contains tithes for the poor. I devote the contents of this box to the service of the poor, to the compensation for their losses, for wood, flannel, bread, &c., for those who stand in need.

He scrupulously adhered to this plan and often said that by so doing he abounded " in wealth."

Thus faithful in little things as in large, in the dedication of himself to his overmastering purpose he gathered up his life and economies, his studies, his gracious words, his unfailing prayers, and his daily deeds into a unity of devotion to his Lord and Master and to his fellow men. It would have been a poor reward for the passionate sacrifices of his threescore years in his earnest devotion to others to have secured for himself a little more of the common luxuries of life or to have considered the comforts which appeal to most men. His great purpose filled all his days with a boundless joy, poor as he was in the world's coin. The apostle who said, " This one thing I do," never felt his longing desire for complete consecration with deeper sincerity.

XI

AFTERMATH

XI

AFTERMATH

IT would be a vain attempt to gather up the influences of such a life as that of Oberlin. It is not left to us, however, to be entirely ignorant of some of them.

The little villages to which he gave almost threescore of his earnest years remain as witnesses to the local permanence of his power after the passing of more than a century.

It is an easy journey by railway from Strasburg to Rothau, the first of the outlying parishes of the ancient Ban-de-la-Roche. It now numbers eighteen hundred people, a large proportion of whom are employed in four factories. One of these factories, in which are six hundred operatives making cotton goods, is under the management of the great-grandson of Oberlin. An excellent public school building for a graded course of instruction provides for the education of the children and youth. A large Catholic church,

which stands in the center of the town, called together on the Lord's Day a goodly congregation of devout worshipers at its services. A Protestant church, commodious and tasteful, was likewise filled with people of an average higher class, and the service in the French language was impressive. The discourse of the minister, earnest and spiritual, was of a high order, both in thought and expression, and was received with appreciative attention.

Life for the most part in Rothau is lowly, but is not lacking in comfort and opportunity for advancement where the qualities exist for achievement. Rothau, though quickened in its life by Oberlin's opening to it the hill-country with good roads, was not under his immediate ministrations, and we shall come closer to him in the five parishes of the mountains.

It was in the lovely August weather, when the air was balmy with the fragrance of the pine and the fir, that we rode among the hills and over them, through valleys and meadows, with forget-me-nots and bluebells nodding to us from the roadsides, while the birds with their songs welcomed us along the way. Crossing the little bridge, the "Pont de la Charité" of Oberlin's construction, across the Bruche, we came to the very

ancient village of Fouday. It has quite a modern appearance now, chiefly owing to the factory which Oberlin introduced, and which is still prospering. The church — one of his charge — remains as he left it. In the churchyard is the good pastor's grave, tenderly cared for to this day by grateful descendants of his former parishioners. The rudeness of earlier days is gone.

Leaving Fouday, we ascend to Oberlin's manse, snuggled in the little village of Waldersbach, as the name is now written. Though the house had not changed outwardly since a visit sixteen years previous, it was not the same home within. The former pastor, whose wife is a granddaughter of Oberlin, had removed to another charge, and with the departure of the Oberlin family, the library and most of the personal possessions of Oberlin had been removed. The church records of the different parishes and interesting aids to local history remain in the parish house.

Still higher up on the mountain, the home of a government forester received us. A little dachshund barked his greetings, and the good woman who presided as host gave us in Alsatian French a gracious reception. Forests of pine, fir, beech, and birch environed us, while through the clearings wide stretches of country with fascinating

beauty added to the glory of this quaint and quiet place.

It was from this point of departure that our excursions were made in the Ban-de-la-Roche as seen to-day in the light of its history.

What did we find? Certainly nothing which corresponds to conditions related by Stuber to Oberlin, nor those which the young missionary soon realized and which burdened his anxious heart. In certain respects it made no tax upon the imagination to picture the ancestors of the people as they were a hundred years ago. The clap of the sabots through the village streets was the same as greeted the ear of the pastor of old time, and for the most part the people in their daily work-day garb had not lost their primitive appearance. It is a pleasant country still, with peasant customs which do not vary greatly from one generation to another. A rural people living the simple life, with relatively few wants, they yet are in comfort and contentment. Life is plain, but the interior of many homes showed appreciative cultivation. Excellent prints hung on the walls, and precious souvenirs of Oberlin, which were the work of his own hand from his individual printing-press, in many homes were sacredly cherished. For the most part the vil-

lagers appeared to be exceptionally intelligent, and not a few of them indicated by their refinement of speech and manner that the influences of the past are still active. The peasantry live almost entirely by agriculture, the women in planting and harvest-time sharing the work with the men. It is the impulsion of thrifty industry more than want that encourages them to do this.

The houses are often of two stories, and are evidently a great improvement upon those of their ancestors. Most of them are thatch-roofed, though some have modern roofs of red tile. All of them have stoves for their winter season, and wood is abundant. There is comfort within when the blasts howl without. The winters have not changed their severe manners, but the people now know how to meet them without fear. In the summer-time the country has lost none of the picturesqueness which was so attractive to the nature-loving Oberlin. The description of the district as he found it, "wild, rough, and barren," does not now answer to its character. The country is neither wild nor rough nor barren. The countryside has shared in the redemption of the people. The hillsides and valleys are rich and fertile, the numerous mountain streams which have been made useful by the complete system

of irrigation which Oberlin introduced have clothed the landscape with smiling fields and pastures. Every available foot of the soil is turned to account. All the houses, which are clustered compactly, have their orchards and their flower-beds of asters, gladioluses, goldenrod, and hollyhock, though each in small compass.

In the middle of September the farmers were cutting and making their second crop of hay, which both in quantity and quality indicated the fertility of their hills.

The little schools were in session, like the New England district schools in our sparsely settled communities. A visit in Waldersbach to the home of the sole survivor of those who had known Oberlin personally, introduced us to an aged matron of eighty-eight years, as alert in mind as ever. Though seventy-six years had passed since Oberlin's death, when she was twelve years of age, she gave a vivid description of his personal appearance and habits when, as a girl, she had seen him "nearly every day coming and going." "He was often at our school, superintending it personally, and always talked with the children." The manse or parsonage is now, as it was then, the center of the village life. The village library is here, and here also assembles the Young Men's

Christian Association. On the Lord's Day, as guests of the pastor, we attended the church. After Oberlin's habit, he had early gone on foot some miles away upon the mountainside to a neighboring village to preach. He returned at eleven o'clock as the church bell rang for the Waldersbach service, the perspiration standing in beads upon his forehead as he came in. Here, as in Rothau, the service was in the French language, by a pastor of education and culture. Evidently the people were receiving, as in the past, the ministry of exceptional ability and culture. The congregation sang hymns well, as congregations should. The pastor read the story of Daniel, the reading being followed by a second hymn, and this by prayer.

The sermon, from the far-aloft pulpit, typifying, doubtless, in the distance above the pews, the elevation of the sacred office, was as carefully prepared as if it were to be preached to a college audience, and indicated not only the intellectual gifts of the preacher but also his appreciative sense of the mental qualities of his hearers. The subject, for example, "Daniel in Babylon," was in reality a plea for "the simple life." This would appear to have been scarcely needed in that locality, and yet there were not many of his

hearers on that day who failed to demit the usual daily costume of the Ban in favor of the modes of Paris. There were no sabots in the house of the Lord; all had attained unto leather. The life of the prophet in the great and brilliant city of Babylon was contrasted by the preacher with the primitive conditions from which Daniel had come. The peculiar temptations of a more complex and strenuous life in cities were pointed out, to the end that his people should rather be content with their homes and homely duties than to be anxious for those of a more difficult and more trying character.

The service closed with the Lord's Prayer, when the church bell was rung for the people who were not present to pause and bow their heads in reverence, as in the "Angelus." So on every Lord's Day in these mountain hamlets the congregations trained in the schools which Oberlin planted are gathered to worship Him whom Oberlin brought in his life and preaching to their ancestors.

The influences of Oberlin's missionary life are still visible in all the district to which he gave his singularly devoted ministry. Generations have gone, but the work which abides testifies to the wise investment of his powers.

We are not to look, however, to this little locality for the full justification of this notable service. Especially significant for a missionary in an age of individualism is the legacy of his theory of social regeneration. His missionary ideas were quite at variance with those then current, and, though this was a century ago, his applications of them, even in that limited sphere, are such as appeal, at the present time, to the most thoughtful students of social service. We are living when attention is directed, with an emphasis that must be heard, to the duties and obligations that arise in the complex relations of life. We are led to the frequent inquiry in the conflicting claims and cries of sociological reforms to ask what, after all, is the theory of life for man in his community relations? Dreamers of all sorts clamor in behalf of their visions. A sentimental school, dangerous and destructive inasmuch as it possesses sufficient truth to appeal to half-truth people, vociferously promises a social millennium. Truth abused becomes pernicious error. Oberlin speaks here, with a voice that has not lost its strength, to keep us true to the only principles of a social regeneration and a social progress which will bear the test of time. The theories apprehended and practised by him quite antici-

pated modern sociological science in its appeal to social conditions and relations. He realized with a wonderful prophecy the fact that man is more than man; that he has relations to human life and its conditions; that he is a brother man who has to do with organized community life. Because the children and youth would soon be the ruling factors in bringing about a better environment, Oberlin began the working out of his sociological scheme with his well-considered and permanent provisions for education as the foundation of true social science. The industrial features, which included instruction in agriculture and the care of trees and fruits with the manual training and the teaching of trades, the interchange of varied employments, and the increase of the comforts of life, were another step to provide a healthy social relationship. Then, by the insistence upon good roads, came the opening of the channels of commerce, that the people might reap the fruits of their new industries. With this were the constant lessons in self-government; the principles of liberty as distinct from socialism and anarchy; and the teachings of the obligations of justice in their corporate relations, that the people might remember that they were members one of another. Thus Oberlin left on record for us

his conviction that all hopes for the betterment of the social state must rest in a true theory of life, that the permanent adjustment of human relations, and the only cure for the evils which afflict mankind, must be upon the basis of Christianity. He saw in his day, as clearly as we can see in ours, that the Supreme Teacher of the meaning and the duties of life in every relation of man to man is the one to whom we must look for the principles of ideal society with any surety of justice and human rights. Social problems that are full of sorrow and pain will find their only solution when He who is the chiefest person in all history has proved his mastery by the influences which he has set in motion, and when he rules in the hearts and consciences of men. So far the world's best civilization, imperfect and partial as it may be, is that which bears the name of Christ. Oberlin taught that there is a Christian doctrine of the family and of its related life, as there is a Christian doctrine of marriage; that there is a Christian doctrine of property and stewardship; that there is a Christian doctrine of industrialism and the relationships of those who are engaged in it; that there is a Christian principle that reaches every form of social relation and effort; and that as experiments depart

from these teachings and principles to meet the conditions of society or to reform the ills of life arising from its complex relations, they lose the strength of truth. Oberlin was right in this a hundred years ago. When people apply other principles, with whatever sincerity, they become foes of order, of human rights and social good. If sociology founded upon the teachings of Christ is not sufficient to secure the noblest ideals and the highest order of social as well as of individual life, then no motives or methods which a lesser wisdom may devise will be adequate to meet the nature and the wants of men. Oberlin insisted upon this with emphasis. In an age which has developed antagonism and hostilities between classes, his legacy to those who will receive it is a prophet's wisdom to say that only as the ethics of Jesus Christ are applied to the rectification of community wrongs as well as to the regeneration of the individual can the conditions be met which insure a happy peace and a true social progress. The New Testament was sufficiently plain in its principles for him, and they appealed to his wisdom and sense of righteousness. They taught him what he taught others — that man with man is a brotherhood which when recognized makes for unity of being and unity of aim. He was con-

stantly saying to his people: "Think as brethren, feel as brethren, and all relations that you owe to the community and the community owes to you will be adjusted. All enduring social welfare must rest in Christian principles and in Christian practise."

It is true that modern industrialism and the complexity of the corporate life of the present day were unknown to him. It is also true that the conditions which now confront this age did not exist when the great Teacher of mankind came and lived in the rural obscurity of Galilee that men might have life and have it more abundantly. The principles, however, which he enunciated and set in motion have proved themselves to be the impelling forces of all endeavors that have as yet made for human welfare, and are the only guaranty for good hopes of its possession. Oberlin was but interpreting his Master in his theory for life in every relation, that the brotherhood of man is the fundamental idea of any philosophy of social good that will meet and subdue the inhuman conditions which afflict society.

This is Oberlin's lesson to those who will heed it. With this faith as the prophet of a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness, he practised the

eternal principles of social regeneration which yet wait for their better comprehension and acceptance.

Though he wrought in obscurity, like his Master, the influence of his spirit and example has been taken to many a mission field the world over by those whose education in their formative years has passed under the traditions and sacred influence of his name, which Oberlin College wears, honors, and helps to make immortal.

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